OLD!

WORLD EXCLUSIVE: FINAL FANTASY VII

retro* GAMER™

THE AWARD WINNING GAMES MAGAZINE

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

THE HISTORY OF **JETPAC**

DEVELOPERS PAY TRIBUTE TO ULTIMATE'S FIRST FRANCHISE





THE STORY OF **MONTY MOLE**

PETER HARRAP ON MONTY'S ORIGINS

READERS' VOTE **TOP 25 C64 GAMES**

THINK YOU KNOW THE WINNER? FIND OUT INSIDE

THE MAKING OF **RADIANT SILVERGUN**

HOW TREASURE REINVENTED THE SHOOT-'EM-UP

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

FINAL FANTASY VII®

DIRECTOR YOSHINORI KITASE EXCLUSIVELY REVEALS THE TRUE STORY BEHIND THE WORLD'S BIGGEST RPG

IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI
DIRECTOR NORIYOSHI OHBA REVEALS HOW HIS COOL NINJA SEQUEL HELPED SELL SEGA'S 16-BIT CONSOLE

KID CHAMELEON
BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE CULT MEGA DRIVE PLATFORMER

SHARP X68000
THE SUPER CONSOLE THAT MADE ARCADE CONVERSIONS LOOK EASY

FROM THE ARCHIVES: DOMARK
DISCOVER THE FULL STORY BEHIND THE 8-BIT PUBLISHER

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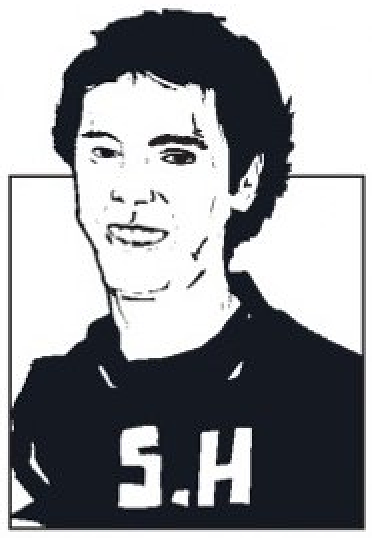
THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE C64 GAME?



DARRAN JONES

Armalyte for me. An astonishing-looking shooter that made me terribly jealous of my mate Mark Elkins.
Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Rage
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

An easy one for me this month – *Maniac Mansion*. With its great graphics, jokes, visuals and characters, the whole thing just blew me away.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Resident Evil 4 HD
Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4 HD



PAUL DAVIES

Probably *Frak!* if that counts? I didn't own a C64, but my trendy mates all told me that *Frak!* looked better on the C64. Gits.
Expertise:
Repeatedly banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Halo: Reach
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



IAIN LEE

Io, easy. A fantastically addictive sideways space-shooter. I broke six joysticks playing that in 1994.
Expertise:
Using a fake American accent to trick Americans on Xbox Live
Currently playing:
Batman: Arkham City
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC Micro version)



JASON KELK

It just has to be Firebird's *Io* for me – excellent graphics, and a sadistic difficulty level wedged into a single load.
Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Scoregasm (PC)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



PAUL DRURY

Obviously *Sheep In Space*, like I tell you every month. Best game ever. Once I saved up for a disk drive, the brilliant *Infocom* adventures and the barking *Space Taxi* also became favourites.
Expertise:
Commercial breaks
Currently playing:
Rage
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space (of course!)



JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

I like to vote for system exclusives. So, *Project Firestart* – you can read my Making Of in last month's issue.
Expertise:
Anything obscure
Currently playing:
STALKER: Call Of Pripyat
Favourite game of all time:
Star Control II



CRAIG GRANNELL

Paradroid. Written specifically for the system, and with a nice mix of abstract oddness, fluid controls and stealth-based blasting.
Expertise:
Games that don't require 37 fingers to play
Currently playing:
Monsters Ate My Condo
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



DAVID CROOKES

Maniac Mansion, because it introduced me to the delights of the point-and-click adventure.
Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Batman: Arkham City
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword

LOADING...

I'm really excited about this month's issue. I'm excited because we are just four issues away from the big 100. I'm excited because we've secured an exclusive interview on one of the greatest shoot-'em-ups of all time. Mainly, though, I'm excited because we've got two ridiculously good exclusives – an insanely in-depth account of *Final Fantasy VII*, and the origin story of *Monty Mole*.

Both articles have been many years in the making (I first chased *Final Fantasy VII* while I was still retro editor of **games™**) so it's truly satisfying to see two widely different titles finally covered in the magazine. **RG** occasionally gets criticised for covering the same old games, and while that will sometimes happen, it's easy to forget that we deliver truly great material that can't be found anywhere else.

Is this me being a little smug? Perhaps. But look at us; we're reaching issue 100 and we're still revealing exciting articles on truly classic games. It's thanks to the persistence of our writers, strong support from publishers like Square Enix – who seem genuinely proud of its past games and have given us unprecedented access – and, of course, our wonderful readership and forum members.

Enjoy the magazine,





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Take a lazy break and relive Atari's quirky water racer

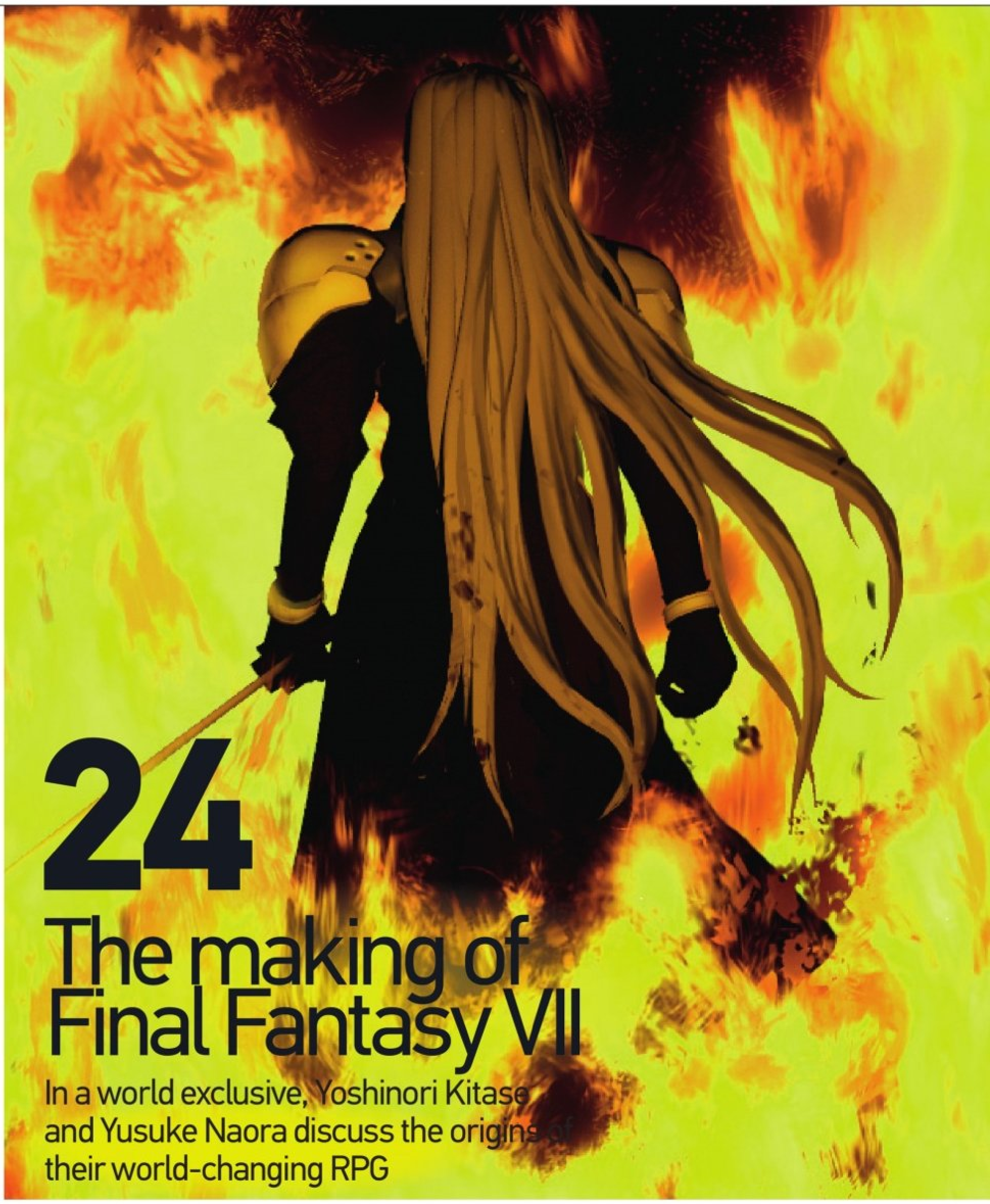
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Discover why Sharp's super console was a must have for arcade fans

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Stuart Hunt tirelessly slaves away to bring you more obscure rarities



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The creator of *Another World* talks to us about his gaming accomplishments and explains how a natural disaster helped pave the way for *From Dust*.



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He's infamous for his disappointing Spectrum port of *Double Dragon*, but coder David Leitch has been involved in a huge number of successful games. Don't believe us? You soon will.

“A game that really deserves its lavish praise” Darran Jones



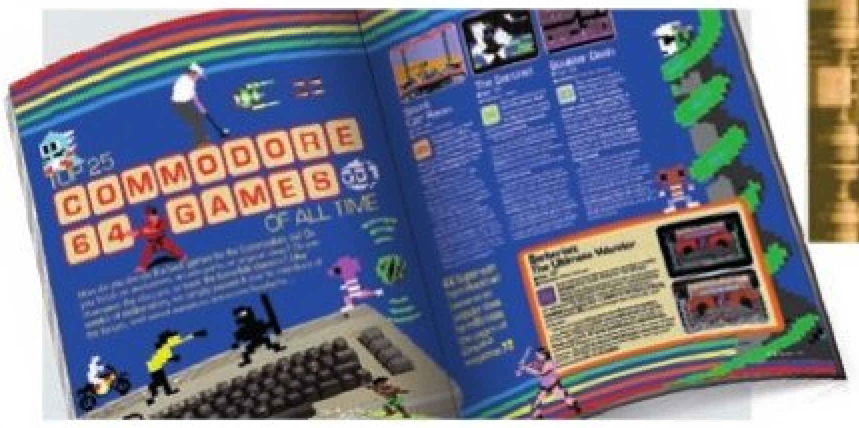
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Treasure reveals the secrets behind gaming's greatest shoot-'em-up



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Peter Harrap comes out of hiding to discuss Gremlin's 8-bit hero

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retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> This month saw the sad passing of Steve Jobs, Apple's co-founder. It's also seen the long overdue addition of PSone Imports to Sony's PSN service and the launch of a brand new fanzine dedicated to Nintendo's NES

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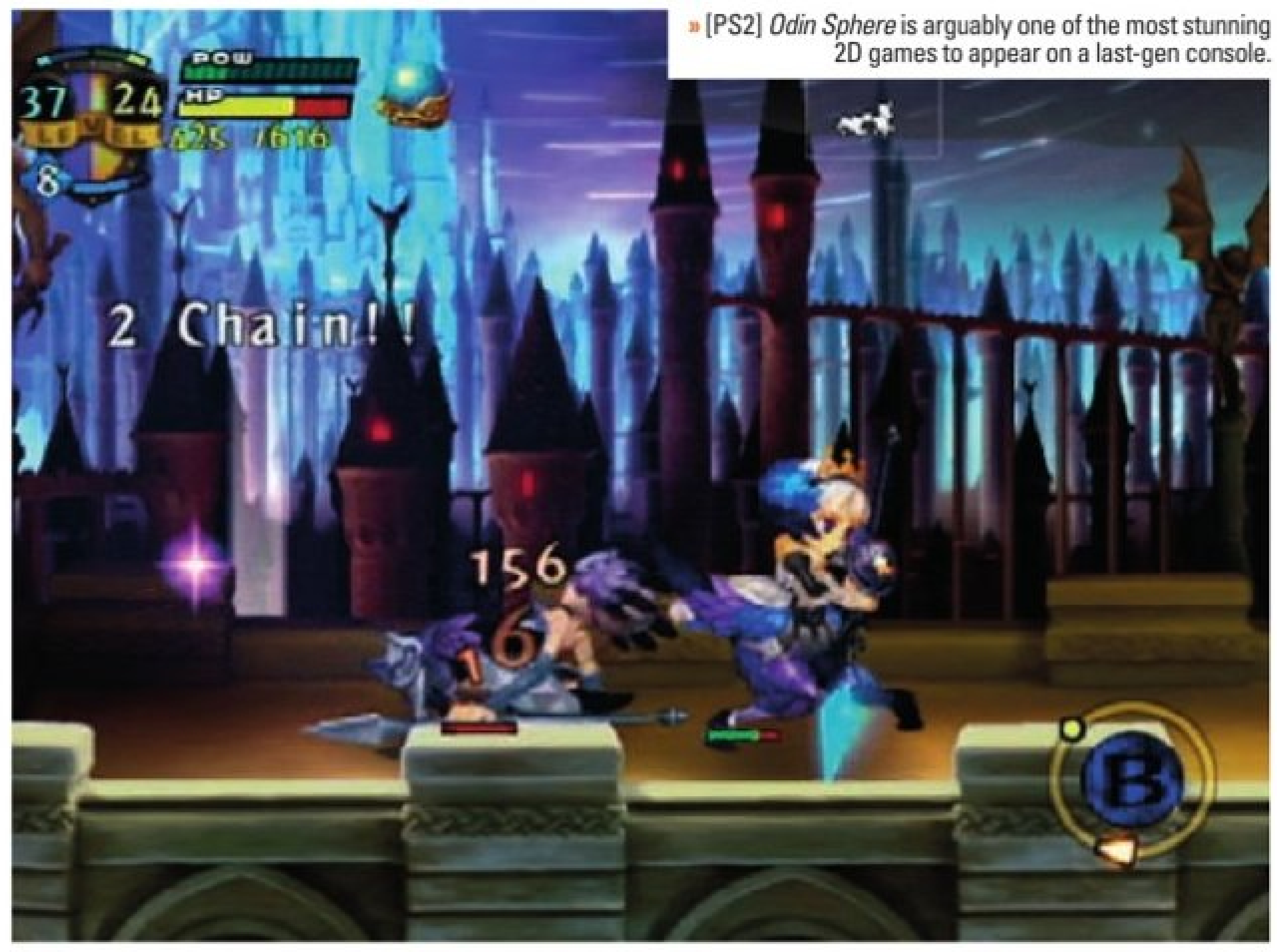
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Forum member Keith Lutener talks to us about his new NES fanzine project



» [PS2] *Odin Sphere* is arguably one of the most stunning 2D games to appear on a last-gen console.



» [PSone] *Arc The Lad 2* was a great RPG that was localised for PSone by Working Designs.



PS1 + PS2 = PS3

SONY ANNOUNCES NEW PSONE AND PS2 GAMES FOR PLAYSTATION 3

PS3 owners may be interested to hear that Sony is introducing more retro games onto its PSN download service.

Original PlayStation owners are catered for with the introduction of PSone Imports, a service offering games that were previously available only in Japan, while Sony has also announced PS2 Classics, which will specialise in emulating PlayStation 2 games.

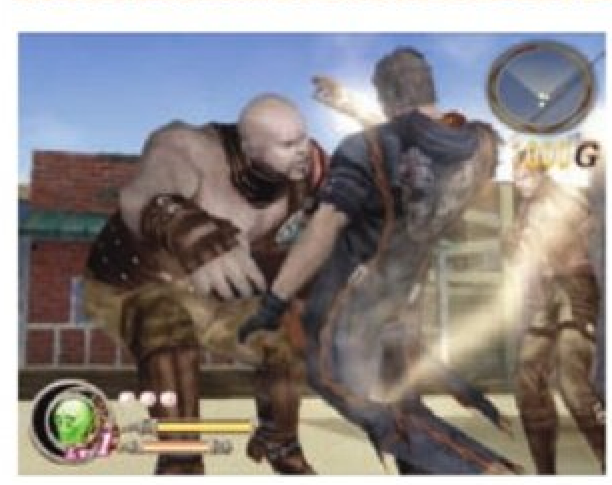
Play magazine's editor, Ryan King, feels the announcement is definitely worth celebrating, particularly as all of the games announced so far are fairly obscure in this country.

"It's a great idea, mostly because of the games that have been announced. The likes of *God Hand* and *Odin Sphere* were mostly ignored the first time round, so it's great that the PlayStation 3 will give those games a new lease of life and chance to find a new audience. It also means we can start making unreasonable demands for other PlayStation 2 games to find their way onto the Classics range – I'm going to throw my vote in for *Shadow Of Rome* early."

The news hasn't been met positively with everyone, though, with some forum members disappointed that they'll now have to pay for digital products due to Sony purposely choosing to remove PS2 compatibility in an effort to reduce costs of the PS3. We asked Ryan if he also felt Sony should have simply left backwards compatibility in from the start.

"The short answer is, yes," he begins. "The long answer is that it's impossible to say without knowing the practicalities of what was involved with Sony's decision to remove backwards compatibility. I'm guessing it just comes down to resource management, even if it was something as simple as the extra space needed to fit the emulation software. But that's all we can do – guess. I don't think backwards compatibility is as crucial to the PlayStation 3 as it was to the PlayStation 2. The PSN Store has helped soften that blow, along with the current avalanche of HD remakes, although that was arguably caused by the lack of backwards compatibility in the

PS2 Classics >> The first five games



God Hand
Publisher: Capcom
Capcom's loopy beat-'em-up redefined the concept of the scrolling fighter and remains a magnificent slice of whacky fun. Fast-paced and with a ridiculous amount of moves, it's continually climbing in price and getting harder to find, making it a good addition to Classics.



Maximo: Ghosts To Glory
Publisher: Capcom
Capcom's second addition to PS2 Classics isn't as rare as *God Hand*, but it is highly enjoyable game. It's essentially a spiritual reboot of the *Ghost 'N Goblins* franchise, with new hero Maximo facing off against the undead and running around in his keks when he's hit.





first place. Given the trend towards digital downloads, I wouldn't be surprised if the PlayStation 4 doesn't have any backwards compatibility."

It's an interesting point, and Sony's rather muted announcement of the new service suggests that it knows early adopters won't be best pleased. Unfortunately, we were unable to get them to commit to any of the questions we asked about the new service, so King's reasoning is as good as any. Yes, it's annoying that backwards compatibility was dropped, but we've always seen backwards compatibility as a nice bonus and not a right. Yes, it was unfortunate that Sony had to drop the compatibility, but we're happy to support its new venture if it comes with decent emulation, a sensible price-point and an interesting range of games.

Of equal interest to retro fans was the recent introduction of PSone Imports to the European download store, a digital service that has been running in the US for some 16 months. Set up by developer MonkeyPaw Games, it specialises in bringing Japanese exclusives to the Western market, meaning that while digital instructions will be included in English, the actual in-game text is identical to what originally came out in Japan. One nice touch is that MonkeyPaw also has the rights to several classic RPGs that were ported by Working Designs, including *Alundra* and *Arc The Lad*.

"Sony has a wealth of classic games available in Japan," begins MonkeyPaw Games' president, John Greiner, when we asked him about the service. "The US and Europe have a fair collection, but not much crossover. Since I was based in Japan for 15 years, I knew many retro games that would find a home on Western shores. Sony America saw this as a great way to expand its library."

Interestingly, one of the most popular genres that MonkeyPaw Games is having success with is the shoot-'em-up, with games like *Chou Aniki*, *Gaia Seed*, *Kyuiin* and even *Dezaemon Plus*, a shoot-'em-up construction kit.

"Shooters have definitely outpaced all the games, although *Alundra* and the *Arc* Series have done admirably well," continues John. "Shooters were a great genre that just fell off the earth; the gaming world moved on. But these are exactly the kinds of Japanese classics that Westerners want to play… easy to pick up, no translations needed, fast and furious action, and beautiful gameplay. Plus, its retro."

Despite PSone Imports being a genuinely great idea, John admits that it's not been very straightforward in getting the service to the masses – with many licences proving quite tricky to secure. Most publishers couldn't/didn't/wouldn't release these games when they were new so there's not a lot of compulsion to do so now. Most would rather have them die than take on any risk, financial or legal. The numbers haven't wowed the ones we have lured so far, so it would really be helpful if fans could make the contribution and buy as many of these classics as possible. If publishers see profit from their efforts, they'll be more likely to allow more games." Here's hoping that publishers begin to change their minds, for as good as PSone Imports currently is, we'd love to see even more diverse titles available. *

"It's great that these games will get a new lease of life"



Odin Sphere
Publisher: Atlus
Vanillaware's gorgeous looking 2D RPG is a spiritual successor to its excellent *Princess Crown* and features a similar blend of scrolling fighting and RPG mechanics. It's a great-looking game and an intriguing one as well thanks to its five interlinking storylines.



GrimGrimoire
Publisher: Nippon Ichi
Vanillaware's second offering is *GrimGrimoire*, a side-on real-time strategy game featuring ridiculously cute witches. Effectively playing as if *Command & Conquer* has been dipped in skittles, it hides a surprisingly deep game under its cutesy exterior.



Ring Of Red
Publisher: Konami
A relatively early release on PS2, *Ring Of Red* is a sorely underrated game. An interesting blend of turn-based and real-time combat, it's full of clever touches including day and night cycles, natural disasters and weather that affects gameplay. Oh, and giant mechs.

THE RETRO DEBATE

>> Who's happy about PS2 Classics?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Megamixer
I voted 'don't care either way'. I think it's good that these games will be available again, but I'll just stick to the original discs and hardware. There are inevitable licensing issues with digital re-releases so it's not guaranteed that every game people want to play will make it onto the PSN.

gmintyfresh
It looks increasingly like the removal of PS2 backwards compatibility from the PS3 was a screw job by Sony to sell more old games.

gman72
It's just typical Sony. Give me backwards compatibility any day.

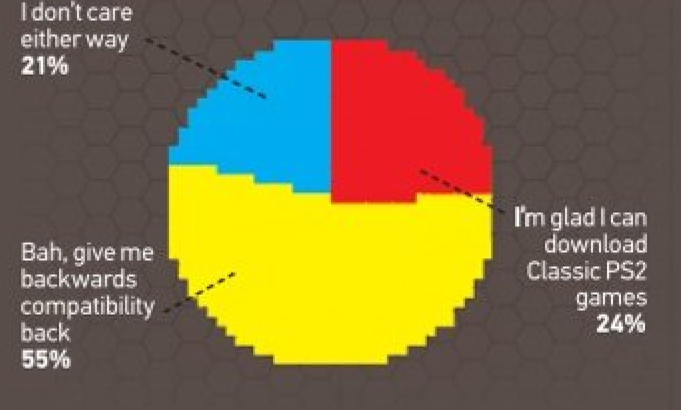
rapidly-greying
If it's that big a deal to people then why don't they just buy a PS2? What price does a PS2 go for these days, 20 quid? Saying that, though, backwards compatibility should have either been in all PS3 models or none at all.

ShadowNeku
Sony is a business concerned with making money. Removing backwards compatibly and offering PS2 games via download is a smart move. Supporting a feature in their console that, although pleasing customers, only serves to add cost to the unit build and encourage spending in the pre-owned market (of which they make no profit) is pointless to them. If you don't like it, secondhand PS2s are easily available. Also, look on the bright side. Certain rarities that you never played due to their high price-tag may be quite affordable on PSN.

Team Alfie
PAL PS2 games come in the most boring cases a collector could ever choose to put on a shelf, so if the price is right, I'm all for downloading some classics. The price won't be right, though, so meh.

Ferret Oxide
If I don't already own a game available to download, and the price isn't too high, I'll buy it. I don't have space for hundreds of games, and I won't turn down a chance to play a good game just because of the distribution method.

FORUM OPINION
Who's happy about PS2 Classics?



Here's the bio...
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. He used to present the 11 O'Clock Show, but please don't hold that against him. You can find more information about Iain at www.iainlee.com

SELECT WING SETTINGS: I DON'T KNOW, 25?!



Easy Games

Games these days are too easy. Seriously. I know you think titles like *Limbo* and *Ramawallah 3* are well hard, but compared to what I had to play growing up, they're a walk in the proverbial computer-generated park.

Case in point – *Revs*. This was a bastard of a game written by Geoff Crammond for the BBC that promised to be the most realistic racing game *ever*. If by realistic they meant soul-destroyingly impossible and no fun to play, then they were right.

Your task sounds simple: drive around a perfectly mapped Silverstone track in a Formula One car. But as soon as it booted up, you were presented with impossible choices. Select wing settings? What on earth did 12-year-old me know about wing settings? To be honest, 38-year-old me doesn't have a clue either. Being enthusiastic boys, and not wanting to look like we didn't know what we were talking about, my friends and I would argue about what would be the appropriate number to enter. We normally settled on 25, that sounds about right, doesn't it?

15 minutes wasted on that, the game would finally start. Much like when you can't remember something hideously traumatic because the brain blanks it out to save you from constantly reliving the pain, I have no idea what the controls were. Actually, I don't think I really knew what they were back in that sweaty classroom during school lunch break. I do recall that it required two people to operate it, always a dodgy position to be in. Remember the pain of choosing the person who would operate your hyperspace on *Defender*? You didn't want someone who is going to press it as soon as a couple of bad-guys appear, but also, you don't want a nutjob who will never press it because they don't want to be seen as a chicken in front of Adele Jessup.

Revs was the most painful driving experience ever. Anyone expecting the fun of *Pole Position* was going to be gutted. But as it had cost so much money, we just *had* to persevere with it. I don't think we ever completed a lap. Ever. Imagine that: a racing game that was so hard, you could not finish *one lap*. Let alone win.

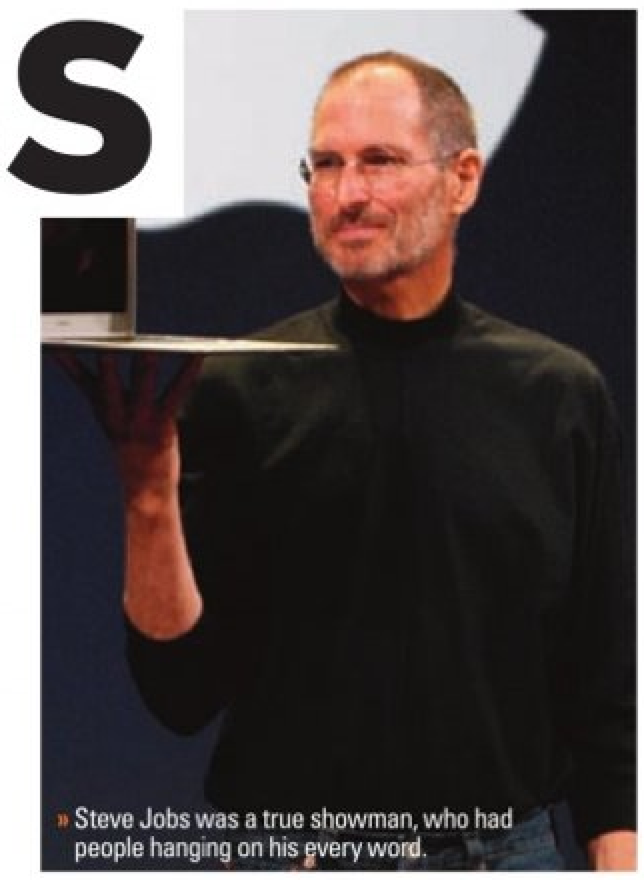
It wasn't all doom and gloom, though. Crammond had a sense of humour and littered the game with 'hilarious' names to make the experience less like having an Acorn Electron shoved up your bum and more like a Kempston joystick. Still unpleasant, but certainly bearable (don't ask me how I know). Who couldn't fail to chuckle at names like Rick Shaw, Miles Behind and Harry Fume. Hang on, that last one doesn't make sense. Man alive, Crammond couldn't even give us a full roster of comedy names!

I for one would like to see a return to games that are too hard and not any fun to play. Maybe you have some examples yourself? As always, keep in touch via: iain@iainlee.com – always interesting to hear your suggestions.

I've no idea what the controls were. In fact, I don't think I knew them back then

STEVE JOBS 1955-2011

APPLE LOSES ITS CORE



» Steve Jobs was a true showman, who had people hanging on his every word.

After a seven-year battle with pancreatic cancer, Apple co-founder Steve Jobs has died. The American entrepreneur and inventor first came to prominence with gamers when he was asked to create a circuit board for Atari's game *Breakout*, which he worked on with friend Steve Wozniak.

In 1976 he co-founded Apple with Wozniak and unleashed the Apple I, a personal computer that was designed and hand-built by Wozniak himself. Apple's next personal computer was the Apple II, which became the teething tool for many of today's leading American game designers, including John Carmack, John Romero, Jordan Mechner, Al Lowe and Richard Garriott.

The Macintosh followed in 1984, and Jobs left Apple shortly afterwards. He went on to found NeXT Computer in 1985, bought the Graphics Group (later renamed Pixar) from Lucasfilm in 1986 and returned to Apple in 1996, after the company revealed it had purchased NeXT Computer for $429 million. Jobs became CEO for Apple and the driving force behind many of its recent devices, including the iPod, iPhone and iPad. A true visionary, his reach and influence upon the industry cannot be underestimated. *

THE INFLUENCE OF STEVE JOBS

Steve Jobs has influenced our lives more than many may realise. Here are just a few of the developments he's been involved with…



TRIBUTES

A great many people, friends and rivals all left tributes to Steve Jobs. Here are just a few of the people who paid tribute to Apple's co-founder when the news broke.



>> Steve Wozniak, Apple co-founder
"People sometimes have goals in life. Steve Jobs exceeded every goal he set himself."

>> Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft
"The world has lost a visionary. And there may be no greater tribute to Steve's success than the fact that much of the world learned of his passing on a device he invented."

>> Steven Spielberg, director
"Steve Jobs was the greatest inventor since Thomas Edison. He put the world at our fingertips."

>> Steve Case, founder of AOL
"I feel honoured to have known Steve Jobs. He was the most innovative entrepreneur of our generation. His legacy will live on for the ages."

>> Barack Obama
"Steve was among the greatest of American innovators – brave enough to think differently, bold enough to believe he could change the world, and talented enough to do it."

>> Tim Cook, Apple CEO
"Apple has lost a visionary and creative genius, and the world has lost an amazing human being. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to know and work with Steve have lost a dear friend and an inspiring mentor. Steve leaves behind a company that only he could have built, and his spirit will forever be the foundation of Apple."

>> Rupert Murdoch, Newscorp
"Today, we lost one of the most influential thinkers, creators and entrepreneurs of all time. Steve Jobs was simply the greatest CEO of his generation."



» Steve Jobs and Bill Gates share a friendly chat at the 2007 D5: All Things Digital conference.

retro columns

PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



Face Melter

R*adiant Silvergun* was the most sensible thing to have emerged from the maniac that brought us *Dynamite Headdy. Gradius V* doesn't count, because that wasn't its idea.

If ever you encountered a human being with the personality of a Treasure game, you wouldn't feel comfortable at all. If they were anything like *Silhouette Mirage*, you absolutely could not let them meet your parents. Not unless you were being deliberately cute.

Radiant Silvergun, though, would be like bringing Jay-Z home to dinner; awesome, but approachable. It's one of those legends built solely on reputation that most people around have heard something about. The kind of reputation that gets you married to a girl like Beyonce. In the case of *Radiant Silvergun*, it means you can always expect to pay around £100 for it on eBay. One of those 'claim to fame' games that you feel proud saying, 'I had that once.' We're talking about gamers here, remember.

Why? Why, though?

A little bit because the Saturn had such a tough time of it. And Saturn owners, myself included (original mouldy green and a white one), were so sick of hearing about *WipEout* when *Radiant Silvergun* would melt your face off. We'll see you your Designers Republic artwork and Chemical Brothers soundtrack and raise you videogame sights and sounds that no marketing money can ever buy.

The presence of Treasure throughout the 32-bit console era assured me that any videogame worth playing would be anything but realistic. The trend for simulation driving games was beginning, along with attempts at first-person shooters such as *Exhumed*. Console football was becoming something worth sinking hours into, but it was Treasure that was still providing those WTF moments that gamers had been celebrating from *Space Invaders* through *Tempest*, and other landmark shooters onwards.

It was a vertically scrolling shooter, but not much else was conventional about *Radiant Silvergun*. Your ship didn't just fire bullets and missiles, it carried blades to swish away enemy fire or scythe through multiple battlements and larger ships. You had to figure out what was going on around the area you were in too, let alone the danger contained within it as objects span and rotated.

Radiant Silvergun was undoubtedly special when it first arrived. Yet, among its endearing qualities is that it mainly formed the foundation for Treasure's next mind-boggling shooter, *Ikaruga*. Despite being this much AWESOME it would never be influential in any other way.

The Saturn was already on its way out, so there were no more battles to be won with brilliant software. *Radiant Silvergun* was only ever released in Japan. Even if it had been made available worldwide it almost certainly wouldn't have charted. It was awesome, but it was hardcore. The reason I remain enamoured by it is that it was one of those special games that reignited my passion for videogames overall. It did 'all this'. I knew there could be more, even if only from Treasure.

Radiant Silvergun is now on Xbox LIVE Arcade, still speaking for itself.

> If it was available worldwide, it wouldn't have charted. It was awesome, but hardcore



» Taking a leaf from our magazine (we suspect) the fanzine even has its very own section dedicated to the NES homebrew scene.

DEVIL MAY CRY HD

It's been rumoured for absolutely ages now, but Capcom has finally announced that its *Devil May Cry* PS2 trilogy will be heading to PS3 in 2012. Released to tie in with the incoming release of Ninja Theory's *Devil May Cry* reboot, Capcom's new collection will feature enhanced visuals for all three games, including the Special Edition version of *Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening* – allowing gamers to play as Dante's brother Vergil. Here's hoping more HD updates follow.



NESESSENTIAL READING

A NEW NES FANZINE HITS VIRTUAL NEWSSTANDS

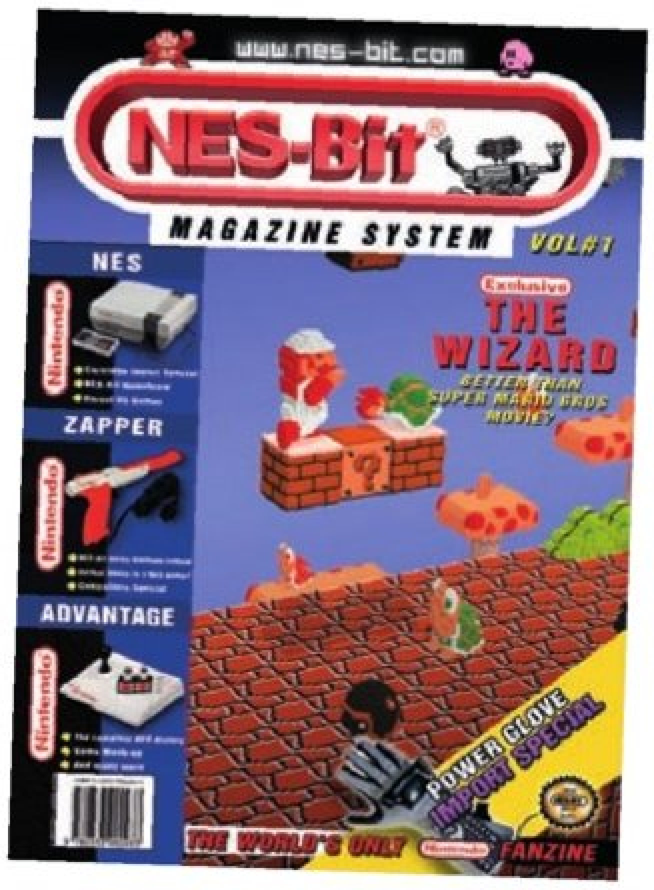
It's one of the most successful consoles of all time, and with a fulsome library containing classic games, ones to avoid, oddities, and holy grails, it's understandable that the NES has become the focus for a great many retro gaming websites since the dawn on the internet. After launching his own superb UK-centric NES fansite, NES-Bit.com, Keith Lutener (known to many of you as Lorfarius on the RG forum) has now turned his talents to producing an affiliated fanzine chock full of NES features and game reviews. We invited him to tell us more.

Why did you decide to dedicate a fanzine to the NES?
At first the idea was born to offer something extra special to anyone who decided to donate to keep the site running. As the idea grew and people came forward from all over the world eager to write, it became apparent there would be enough interest for an actual publication. It's been close to 15 years since any official NES publication and the hope is this will satisfy the hunger for something new.

How long has it taken to create and how many people are involved?
It's taken roughly two months and the effort from the team has been tremendous in such a short time. We had nine people involved, all writing a different number of articles, piquing the interest of some professional writers along the way. We owe a great deal to the community and they deserve thanks for their efforts.

Is this going to become a monthly effort, or is it just a one off?
Issue one is meant to test the waters with content that's exclusive away from the main site. We have already had an overwhelming positive response to the PDF version so a second issue is certainly on the cards. As long as the interest and support is available then a bi-monthly or maybe quarterly release schedule is possible. We rely on community members and volunteers so it's worth popping over to our forum if the idea of contributing appeals.

Will you be able to buy *NES-Bit Magazine System*, and if so how much will it cost?
The PDF edition will be available for £1.99 on NES-Bit.com, with printed editions available soon for £3.50. In the lead up to attending several retro



gaming events in the next few months we are aiming to take enough copies for all. There will also be a special 3D back-cover included with the printed edition with a pair of 3D glasses to view it.

What do you think makes it stand out from other fanzines?
We have gone for as professional a look as possible, even going so far as to hire a graphic designer (Greyfox from the **Retro Gamer** forums) to do the page layouts. A lot of NES-Bit focuses on the UK side of the NES market, but with the magazine I tried to gather as many people as possible to write the articles covering enough content to appeal to NES fans across the world. ✱

THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH



Jet Set Willy Shoes

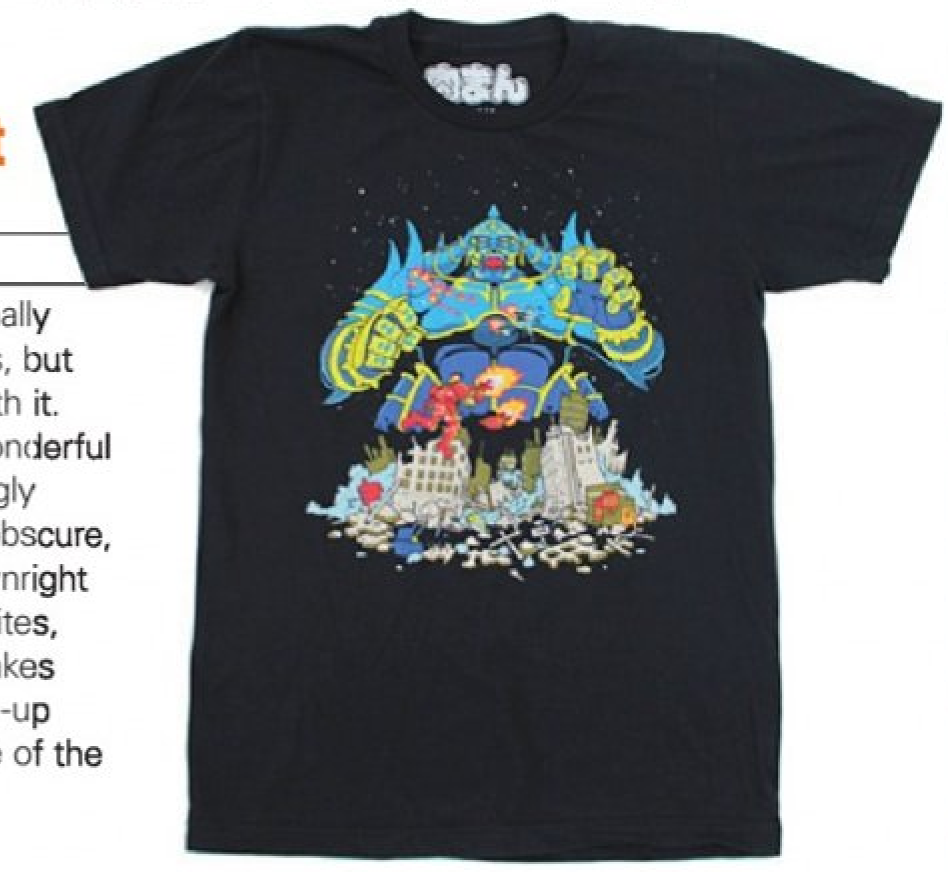
- **RRP:** £50
- **Buy it from:** www.zazzle.co.uk

It may have taken a long time for us to get here, but the plimsoll has finally met with 8-bit working class hero Miner Willy. The results of this unusual marriage between retro footwear and retro game sprite is finally here for all to see. Coming in a striking black and white colour, and adorned with the walking animation of Willy from *Jet Set Willy*, these are unique comment-attracting outdoor clothes for your feet. Be warned, though – they're not cheap.

Lost Worlds T-Shirt

- **RRP:** $24 (approx £15.30)
- **Buy it from:** www.meatbun.us

The chaps over at Meat Bun have finally unleashed their new range of T-shirts, but the long wait has certainly been worth it. As usual, they've come up with a wonderful wallet-surrendering selection of lovingly produced retro-inspired tees, some obscure, some funny, all cool – and a just downright gross *Metroid* tee. One of our favourites, though, is this stunner here, which takes inspiration from a Capcom shoot-'em-up classic. We won't say which; the title of the tee is an obvious clue.





Nintendo Salt/ Pepper Shaker

- **RRP:** $12.99 (approx £8.28)
- **Buy it from:** www.bigbadtoystore.com

Being a hearty Italian, and portly, it's fair to say Mario is a big lover of food. Well, we all know he's a connoisseur of mushrooms, particularly ones with magical growth properties – Toad should really watch his back. Anyway, we'd like to draw your attention to these cool salt/pepper shakers which have designed in the image of a *Super Mario Bros* growth mushroom. Just unscrew the mushroom tops, fill with a seasoning of your choice, and then away you go. An arguably sad way to pep or salt up your food.



Crystal Castles Hooded Sweatshirt

- **RRP:** £28.75
- **Buy it from:** www.zazzle.co.uk

We were just thinking the other day, after being involved in a *Heat*-style gem heist led by a man in bear suit, that there are some classic games that seem to be lacking the respect they deserve when it comes to associated merchandise. Thankfully, Zazzle is a good place to visit if you want to make a lifestyle choice of a favourite game, and it isn't just *Street Fighter II*, *Space Invaders*, *Mario* or *Pac-Man*. Take this natty *Crystal Castles* hooded sweatshirt, for example, which offers comfort and cosy protection to fans of the Atari classic.



Penguin Rush Christmas Card

- **RRP:** £2.50
- **Buy it from:** RetroGT.com

The holiday season is fast approaching, so why not send out these charming Christmas cards from RetroGT to you friends and family? The art style is not only beautiful, but kind of reminds us of the excellent *Cannon Fodder*, which is no bad thing in itself. You can also extend the value of the card by telling the receiver to study it for 30 seconds and then answer a quiz you've written inside. We'd go for: 'How many penguins are there', and, 'What is under attack?'



*A MOMENT WITH...

Eric Chahi

In this month's "A Moment With...", Eric Chahi remembers Another World, and discusses Mother Nature's surprise impact on From Dust

Who is Eric Chahi?

Eric Chahi is a French developer, most famous for his epic 1991 adventure *Another World*. He learnt to cut his programming teeth on the Oric Atmos and Amstrad CPC, and has recently found great success with his excellent digital game *From Dust*.

Which of your games would you recommend and why?
From Dust, because it brings something unique in term of gameplay through a simulation. I mean this geological simulation – where you can interact with river, ocean, volcanoes – is meaningful in term of universe and gameplay at the same time. It speaks about the relationship between men and the power of nature and it brings a lot of emergent gameplay, which was very challenging. I feel that it's a major step in my career.

Are you surprised by the interest that *Another World* still generates?
Yes. The recent invitation to GDC 2011 Classic Postmortem has been a surprise and a big recognition for me. It was a big moment to share the creation of this game.

Would you ever want to revisit it for another sequel?
No. I think the story is complete. It has a lot of mystery, so doing a sequel would be very risky, it could break the magic it has.

What's your best memory of being in the industry?
The smiles from those playing my games.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
Managing a team creatively. It is very difficult because my ideas are often out of standard scope, as I'm working on the feeling that the game can communicate to the player. So it is hard to make people understand it before it's been realised.

What industry veteran do you admire?
Will Wright, for his mastering of game design based on complex systems.

What's your darkest memory of being in the industry?
It was a really tough time when Virgin Interactive decided to abandon *Heart Of Darkness* in 1996 after four years of development. It was the conjunction of financial difficulties and the loss of trust in Amazing Studio to finish the game. The tension in the team was extreme at that moment. Financially Infogrammes, ended up taking the flame, so it ended happily.

And your best?
Music! I love the orchestral recording of *Heart Of Darkness's* music by Bruce Broughton. Also the percussion recording for *From Dust* at Bashiri Johnson's studio.

Please tell us one interesting industry related anecdote…



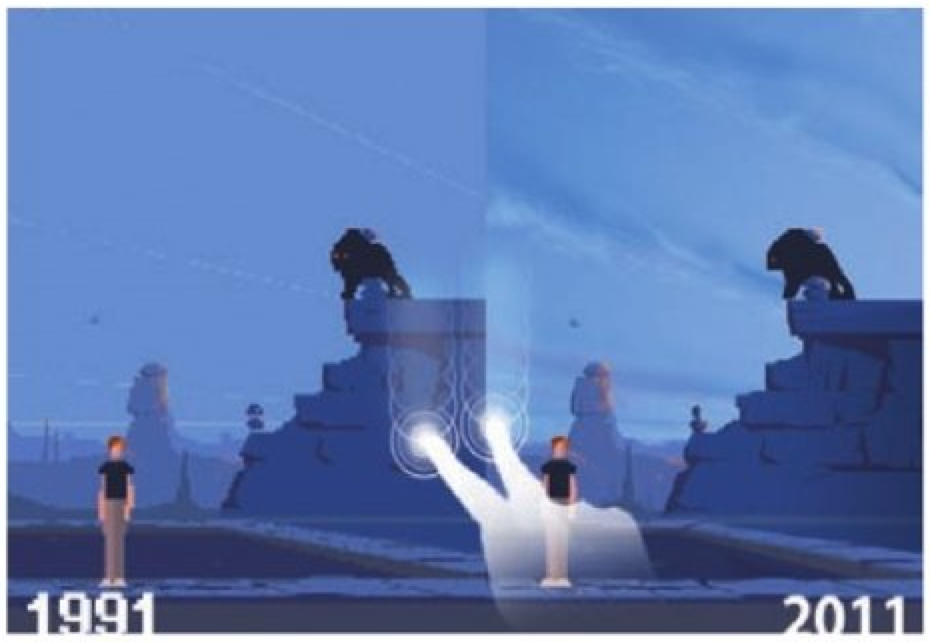
» [iOS] *Another World* astonished gamers when it was first released in 1991. Many people often mistake *Flashback* to be its sequel.

> "Creativity shines when there's a big change, when rules are broken"



In 2010, the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland had a serious and positive impact on *From Dust*. Some transatlantic flights for the top management at Ubisoft had to be cancelled due to volcanic ash. As we were not the most important project at Ubisoft, this freed up some room for us to have an important meeting where we convinced them to announce *From Dust* at GDC Europe. It was like Mother Nature was helping to create a game with volcanoes!

How has the industry changed in the last 20 years?
It's gone through various phases. With moments where creativity shines and others when it freezes. The creativity shines when there is a big change in the industry, when rules are broken. After the console crash 20 years ago, the rise of personal computers brought a new breath of creativity. In 2004-2005 the internet changed how things were done regarding the distribution. It allowed independent developers to sell their games, or self publish them, which was impossible in 2000. Now there's a large variety of stuff being created, from gigantic productions, to humble-but-amazing games like *Flower*. *





11 November – 8 December

retrodiary

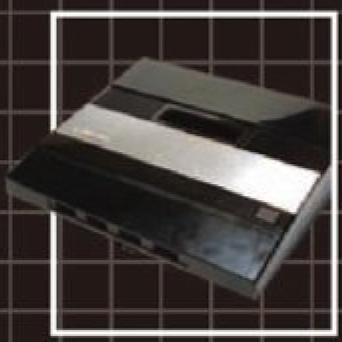
>> A month of retro events both past and present



11 November 2006
■ The PlayStation 3 makes its debut in Japan. Four months later, Sony very kindly released it in the UK.



11 November 2011
■ *The Elders Scrolls V: Skyrim*, from Bethesda Softworks, is available for the Xbox 360 and PS3.



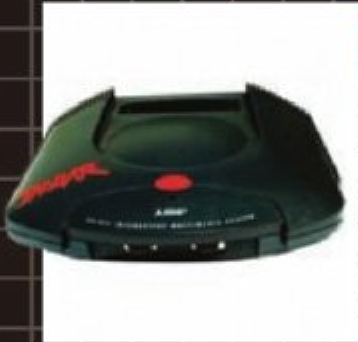
12 November 1982
■ The Atari 5200 console is released in America.



18 November 2011
■ Scheduled for its UK release is *The Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword* on the Wii.



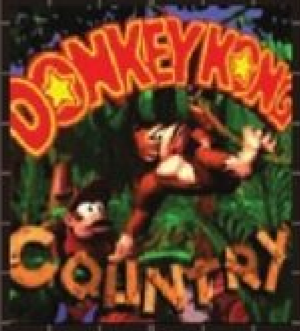
24 November 2000
■ The Sony PlayStation 2 is finally released in the UK. 11 years later it has sold a total of 150 million units worldwide.



23 November 1993
■ Atari's newest console, the Jaguar, goes on sale for the first time in America. Everywhere else gets it a year later.



21 November 2010
■ And they're back… *Donkey Kong Country Returns* is released exclusively on the Nintendo Wii in the US.



21 November 1994
■ *Donkey Kong Country* is released in the UK and US on the Super Nintendo.



24 November 2000
■ Developed by Free Radical and released by Eidos, the first-person shooter *TimeSplitters* goes on sale in the UK on PS2.



30 November 1990
■ Sega finally get around to releasing the Mega Drive in the UK and Europe, two years after it debuted in Japan.



1 December 1982
■ Activision releases the superb *River Raid* on the Atari 2600.



2 December 2004
■ Nintendo's new Game & Watch-styled split screen DS handheld goes on sale for the first time. The US gets first dibs.



7 December 1984
■ An isometric classic and a seminal Spectrum game, *Knightlore* by Ultimate is released to much jaw-droppage.



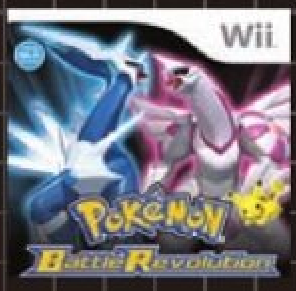
6 December 2002
■ LucasArts release *Star Wars: Bounty Hunter* on the PlayStation 2, in which you take on the role of Jango Fett.



2 December 2011
■ *Mario Kart 7* for the Nintendo 3DS is set for release. New additions include underwater driving and hang-glider kart attachments.



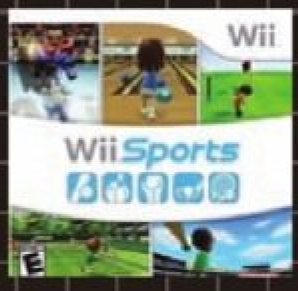
2 December 2005
■ The Xbox 360 is officially released in the UK. The US gets their hands on it first though on 16 November.



7 December 2007
■ *Pokemon Battle Revolution* arrives for the Wii. It's the first game to wirelessly interact with the DS.



8 December 2006
■ Nintendo's Wii is officially released in the UK. Within days, controllers are crashing through windows and bouncing off walls.



8 December 2006
■ *Wii Sports* is launched in Europe. Including bundled console sales, it's sold over 75 million copies – it's now the best-selling game ever.



8 December 2011
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets

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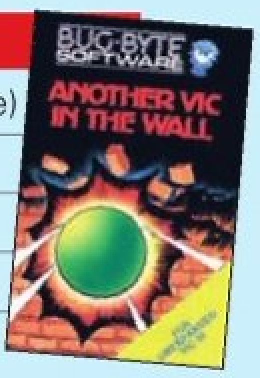
BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



CHARTS

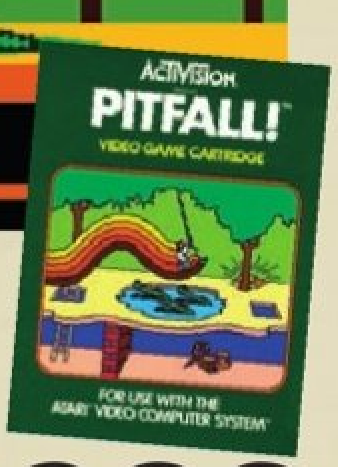
SEPTEMBER 1982

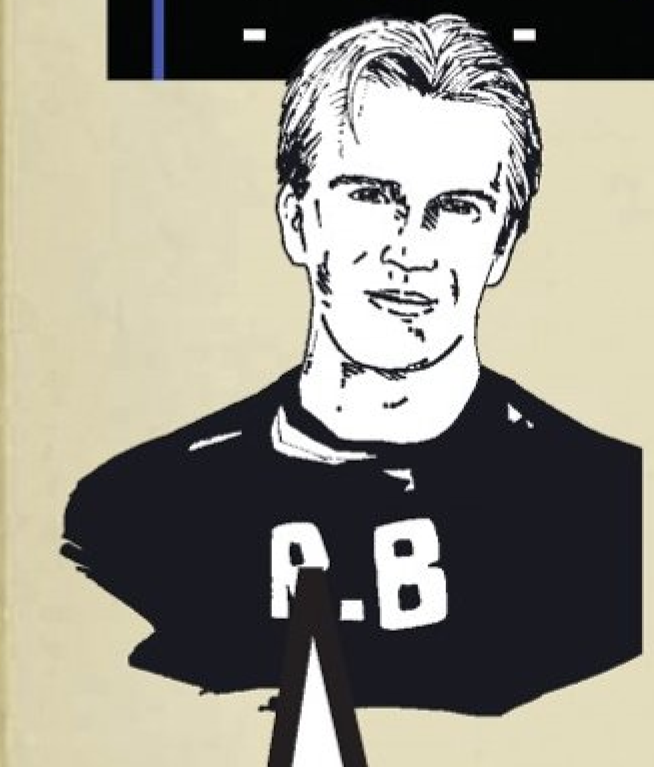
VIC-20	
1	Another Vic In The Wall (Bug-Byte)
2	Asteroids (Bug-Byte)
3	Space Storm (Rabbit Software)
4	Amok (Audiogenic)
5	Blitz (Commodore)



» [Atari 2600] Does 2600 gaming get any better than David Crane's *Pitfall!*? Sold in the millions and deservedly so.







THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1982

SEPTEMBER 1982 – Atari falls for Pitfall!, Bug-Byte backs down, CGL Puck Monster arrives, Jupiter Ace and Ultimax due, Psion delivers games while Delta Tau One begins a manic journey. Richard Burton hopes his copy of Delta still loads…

The Atari 2600 was having a purple patch for new game releases, and September continued the run. Created by David Crane and released by Activision was the jungle run-and-jump classic *Pitfall!*. Introducing Pitfall Harry, you must guide him through the jungle, jumping and swinging your way past crocodiles and scorpions to find the treasure, all against the clock. *Pitfall!* was a huge hit for Activision on the 2600, selling 4 million copies and becoming the second-bestselling Atari 2600 game ever.

Also from Activision and due for imminent release was the excellent *Chopper Command*. Your mission is to protect a convoy of trucks while destroying the enemy planes and helicopters. It was unashamedly a *Defender*-esque game but played much better than Atari's own official 2600 version. For one thing the graphics were smooth and flicker-free, unlike the atrocious *Defender*.

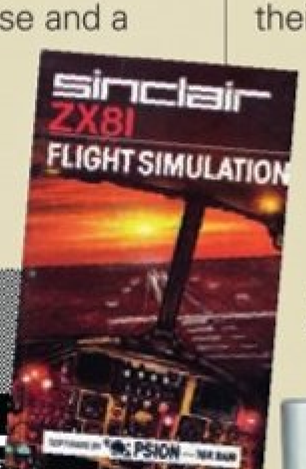
Atari took its interest in Bug-Byte's Commodore VIC-20 *Pac-Man* game, *Vic-Men*, to the next level by seeking an injunction to stop the sale of the game, as Atari thought it infringed the *Pac-Man* copyright. It also singled out another *Pac-Man* clone, Commodore's *Jelly Monsters*, also for the VIC-20.

In both cases Atari wanted sales of the offending games to stop and for the remaining stocks and all profits from sales of them to be handed over, and to have full access to both companies' records.

Bug-Byte, not having the financial clout to battle the juggernaut that was Atari, backed down, gave up its *Vic-Men* stock and ceased selling the game. Commodore was still mulling over its next move…

CGL was also climbing aboard the *Pac-Man* bandwagon with its release of *Puck Monster*. However, its game was of the tabletop electronic variety, with an attractively curved yellow case and a vacuum fluorescent display.

With the usual *Pac-Man* maze to negotiate and pills to pop, *Puck Monster* was a huge hit for CGL when released at a price of £24.95. The only downside was the built-in miniature joystick, which was so stiff that it guaranteed a blister on your thumb after prolonged use.





» [ZX81] A flight simulation in 16K? You bet… and it was damn good too.

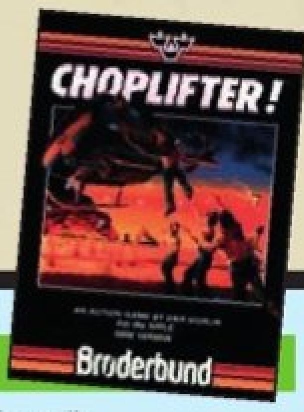
It wasn't from Jupiter and was never that ace, but Jupiter Cantab insisted that its new home micro, the Jupiter Ace, was the future of home computing.

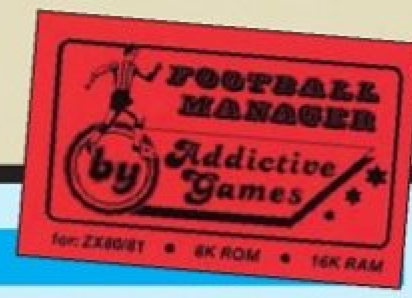
Jupiter Cantab, a company set up by Richard Altwasser and Steve Vickers, both of whom were heavily involved in the design of the ZX81 and Sinclair Spectrum, left Sir Clive's employ in April to pursue their Jupiter Ace dream.

The Jupiter Ace boasted 3K of RAM and 8K of ROM and, uniquely, was the first home computer to use FORTH as its default programming language rather

»Introducing the Jupiter Ace from Jupiter Cantab. It encouraged us to dump BASIC and go FORTH and multiply…









APPLE II

1. Choplifter! (Brøderbund)
2. Wizardry: Knight Of Diamonds (Sir-Tech)
3. Pursuit Of The Graf Spee (SSI)
4. Rendezvous: A Space Shuttle Flight Simulation (Edu-Ware)
5. Deadline (Infocom)

ZX81

1. Football Manager (Addictive Games)
2. Mazeman (Abersoft)
3. 3D Monster Maze (JKGreye Software)
4. QS Invaders (Quicksilva)
5. Meteor Storm (dk'Tronics)

MUSIC

1. Eye Of The Tiger (Survivor)
2. Private Investigations (Dire Straits)
3. The Bitterest Pill (I Ever Had To Swallow) (Jam)
4. Save A Prayer (Duran Duran)
5. Walking On Sunshine (Rocker's Revenge Ft. Donnie Calvin)

SEPTEMBER 1982 NEWS

14 September saw the death of a princess in a car crash. Princess Grace of Monaco, also known as Grace Kelly, died after her car was involved in a crash.

Her car apparently left the road and tumbled repeatedly as it fell into a ravine. The Princess's daughter, Princess Stéphanie of Monaco, was also in the car but suffered only superficial bruising.

Grace suffered a brain haemorrhage, and despite hospitalisation her condition deteriorated. Investigations followed and suggested that she had suffered a stroke while driving.

9 September brought the UK premiere of the Ridley Scott science fiction film starring Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer and Daryl Hannah, *Blade Runner*.

On 26 September, the first transmission of a new television series occurred. The first episode of *Knight Rider* introduced us to David Hasselhoff as the crime-fighting Michael Knight, and the real star of the show. KITT was a Pontiac Trans Am installed with an advanced supercomputer with an ego to match, and a turbo boost that was used at least once per episode…



» Knight Rider - a crime fighting David Hasselhoff and a talking Trans Am with turbo boosts a plenty. What's not to like?

30 September saw another much-loved series premiere on US television: the bar-based comedy called *Cheers*, starring Ted Danson and Shelley Long, alongside many other great characters. *Cheers* was almost cancelled early in its first series after the premiere rated as the worst of any new series. It survived and went on to become a hit, running for 11 seasons, 270 episodes, and one equally popular spin-off, *Frasier*.

than the more conventional BASIC. The Jupiter Cantab team confirmed that the Ace would be aimed more at the programmer than the games player.

With Sinclair having great success with the Spectrum and having just slashed the price of the ZX81 to £49.99, the £89.99 price tag for the Jupiter Ace no longer seemed that attractive. It would be available from the beginning of September, initially through mail order only.

Another new micro intended to have its official UK release in time for Christmas was the Commodore Max, also known as the VC-10 in Germany and Ultimax in America. The Max was released in Japan essentially as a very cut-down version of the Commodore 64. However, it made virtually no impact on the market there and was quickly discontinued. Plans for the UK release of the Max in December, priced at £110, were shelved.

A swath of new ZX81 software was promised by Sinclair for its own-brand software label. Despite the many educational titles, a few nuggets of gaming joy also materialised. Not least was the excellent *Flight Simulation*. Developed by Psion, it simulated flying a twin-engine, propeller-driven light aircraft and, given the limitations of a 16K ZX81, Psion had done wonders to create something so involved. *Flight Simulation* proved to be a huge success for both parties.

The two companies collaborated again to release several new titles for the new Sinclair Spectrum. They were launched at the Personal Computer World Show, the annual trade fair held in London every September. As was the trend at the time, all three were thinly disguised variants of current arcade favourites: *Hungry Horace* was *Pac-Man*, *Space Raiders* was *Space Invaders*, and *Planetoids* was *Asteroids*. That said, they were all good renditions and a step in the right direction for Spectrum software.

Cases Computer Simulations, more commonly known as CCS, released its next two management strategy games on both the ZX81 and Spectrum. Having recently released its first game, *Print Shop*, it followed it up with *Airline* and *Auto Chef*. Sadly, both were slated for being absolutely awful.

» [TRS-80] *Delta Tau One* for the Tandy was Matthew Smith's first commercial product. It sold 14 copies…



» [Spectrum] A new wave of Sinclair games for the Spectrum introduced us to the iconic Horace in his first outing.





New this month from Molimerx Ltd was *Delta Tau One* for the TRS-80. It was a simple yet deceptively testing *Space Invaders/Phoenix*-styled game, and although the black-and-white graphics were simplistic, what it lacked in visuals it made up for with the frantic speed of gameplay and smoothness of sprite movement. Once you had shot your way through six levels, you would then have to do it all again but with the added impediment of a shower of missiles raining down on you.

Despite its quality, *Delta Tau One* was barely heard of, even on the TRS-80 software scene. Literally only a handful of copies of the game were bought, with the programmer once stating that he thought it had only sold about 14 copies.

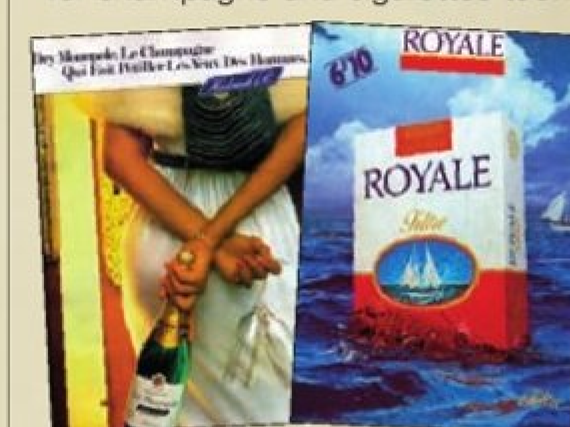
This being the programmer's first ever commercial foray into games development, it wasn't the most spectacular of starts to a coding career. Still, Matthew Smith's time was yet to come…

THIS MONTH IN…

TILT



The first issue of the long-running French games magazine made its debut this month. With articles on handheld LCD games, Intellivision, the arcade on Brighton Pier and pinball tables, it was certainly a varied read. It was interesting to note the full-page ads for champagne and cigarettes too…



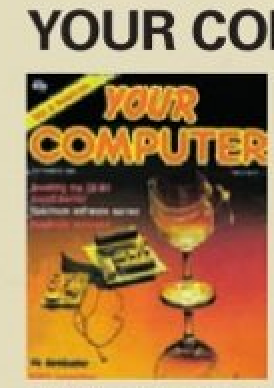
POPULAR COMPUTING WEEKLY



PCW spoke to Steve Vickers and Richard Altwasser. Both helped design the Spectrum but wanted to make their own micro. The Jupiter Ace began development while they worked at Sinclair, but they left just after the Spectrum was launched.



YOUR COMPUTER



YC interviewed Hermann Hauser, Acorn's technical director, about beating Sinclair to the BBC deal. Hauser said: "The BBC came in on the Monday with the specifications and returned on the Friday and saw a working prototype." He added: "Clive Sinclair had a terrible chip on his shoulder."

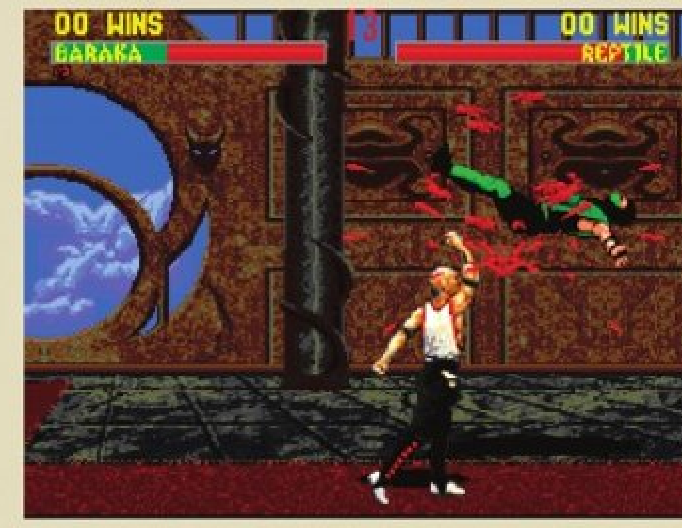


BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Mega Drive] "Superheroes and evil twins go together like peanut butter and… evil peanut butter."

» [Mega Drive] More spine-ripping and decapitation with the hugely playable *Mortal Kombat II*. Babalities maybe… but Friendships? Seriously?



» [Mega Drive] 20 years in the cubes for the game, then it's off to the Titan Penal Colony for the movie makers…





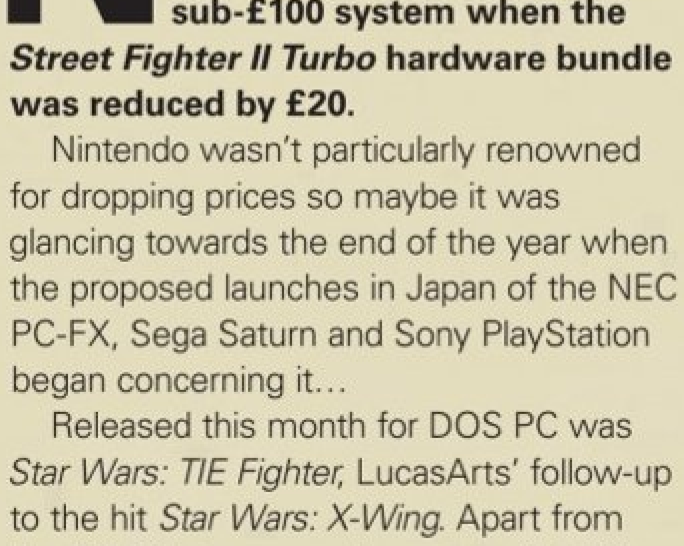
THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1994

JULY 1994 – Something something something TIE Fighter, a worm infects the Mega Drive, Mortal Kombat II edges closer, Ecco The Dolphin returns while Dredd prepares for console conversion. Judge Burton warms up Resyk for Stallone…

Nintendo announced price cuts to its existing SNES bundle, making it, for the first time, a sub-£100 system when the *Street Fighter II Turbo* hardware bundle was reduced by £20.

Nintendo wasn't particularly renowned for dropping prices so maybe it was glancing towards the end of the year when the proposed launches in Japan of the NEC PC-FX, Sega Saturn and Sony PlayStation began concerning it…

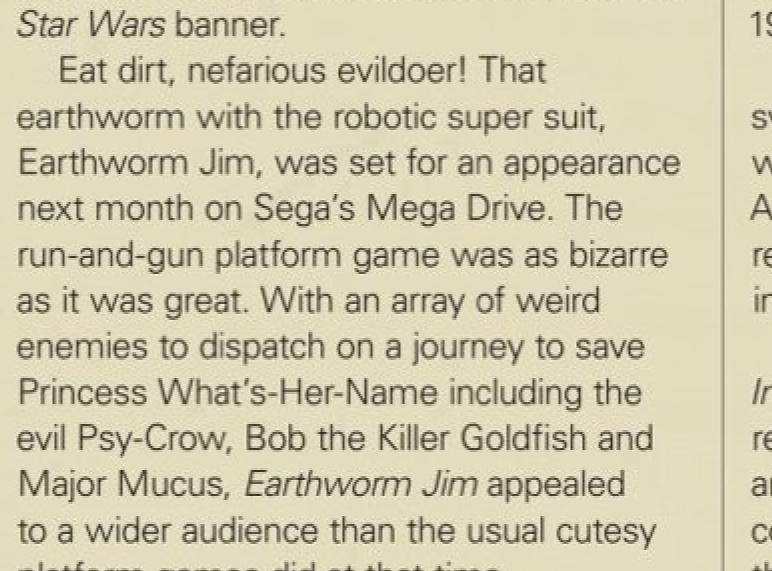
Released this month for DOS PC was *Star Wars: TIE Fighter*, LucasArts' follow-up to the hit *Star Wars: X-Wing*. Apart from the TIE Fighters, you also got to pilot TIE Bombers and TIE Interceptors, as well as several other new ships. *TIE Fighter* relied heavily on the *Heir To The Empire* novels for plot but turned out to be a superb game, arguably one of the best released under the *Star Wars* banner.



» [PC] *TIE Fighter* was a terrific space flight simulator and, as such, spawned two further expansion packs.

Eat dirt, nefarious evildoer! That earthworm with the robotic super suit, Earthworm Jim, was set for an appearance next month on Sega's Mega Drive. The run-and-gun platform game was as bizarre as it was great. With an array of weird enemies to dispatch on a journey to save Princess What's-Her-Name including the evil Psy-Crow, Bob the Killer Goldfish and Major Mucus, *Earthworm Jim* appealed to a wider audience than the usual cutesy platform games did at that time.

The success of *Earthworm Jim* was such that developer Shiny Entertainment, led by David Perry, spawned not only several conversions but a cartoon series in partnership with Universal Animation Studios, which aired through 1995-96 and itself became a cult classic.



» [Amiga] No, not the highlights from a Millwall vs Leeds United match. It's *Wild Cup Soccer* by Millennium.

With the World Cup in the USA in full swing, the onion bag full of football games was brimming over with mediocrity. Two Amiga football projects had still to be released but updates from the developers indicated that they would be ready soon.

Electronic Arts' officially endorsed *FIFA International Soccer* had already been released on several console platforms and had done extremely well. The Amiga conversion looked every bit as good as those versions and would surely win over all those looking for an element of realism to their arcade football games.

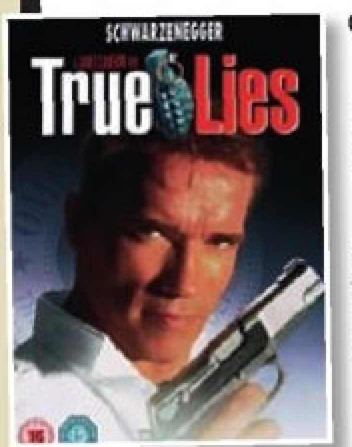
Alternatively, there was *Wild Cup Soccer* from Millennium. The object of the game was to win by taking out the opposition in a way that makes Joey Barton look like a fluffy bunny. So forget your namby pamby two-footed tackles; you're allowed to punch and gun down anyone who looks like they may score a goal. The use of bombs and swords is also allowed. However, shin pads must be worn at all times…

The first exclusive looks at Acclaim's Mega Drive sequel to *Mortal Kombat* were appearing in the gaming press. *Mortal Kombat II* would feature several new characters including Jax, Baraka,

JULY 1994 NEWS

With the 15th World Cup under way in the USA, the excitement and the pomp of the occasion was suddenly halted with the news that Colombian footballer Andres Escobar had been murdered at the age of 27.

On 2 July Escobar had returned to his home town of Medellin in Colombia after the team had been eliminated from the World Cup, due in part to an own goal the defender had scored in a 2-1 defeat to the USA. He was out at a nightclub until around 3am when three men and a woman began arguing with him in the car park. Two of the men took out guns and repeatedly shot him. Escobar died shortly afterwards.



» *True Lies* was a surprisingly fun spy caper that was followed by an bland videogame.

It was thought the murder was punishment for the own goal, which may have cost betting syndicates in Colombia vast sums of money, as they were expected to qualify for the second round of the tournament.

The World Cup ended on 17 July with Brazil beating Italy in a penalty shoot-out, the first in a World Cup Final after a dour 0-0 draw. The Divine Ponytail, Roberto Baggio, was the unfortunate Italian player to miss the vital spot-kick.

15 July saw the premiere of Arnold Schwarzenegger's latest movie, *True Lies*. Despite being an action movie, the tongue was firmly placed in cheek throughout, with it not taking itself too seriously. Highlights included Arnie's on-screen wife, Jamie Lee Curtis, dancing around in her underwear.

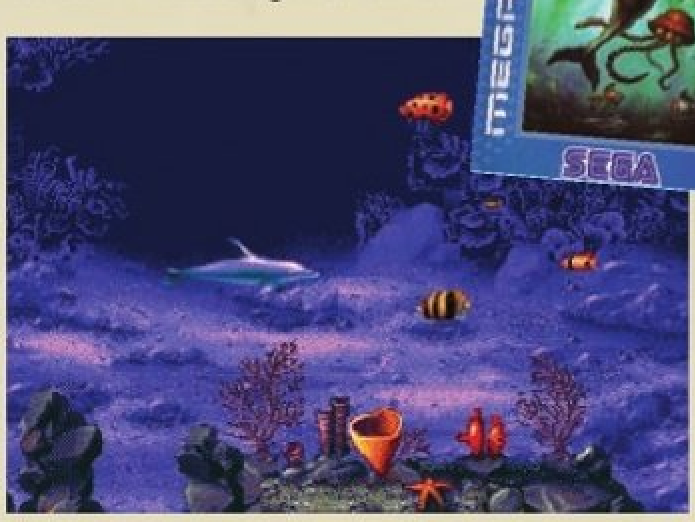
Kitana and Mileena, as well as some new hidden opponents: Noob Saibot, Jade and Smoke. Toss into the mix bigger character sprites, new moves and the introduction of different finishing moves such as Babalities, stage-specific Fatalities and the absurd Friendships, which included such cheese as giving presents or dancing.

Mortal Kombat II proved to be a resounding success when released in September and was critically acclaimed by reviewers and gamers alike.

Acclaim also had great news for fans of the UK comic *2000 AD*. It announced that it had obtained the rights to the soon-to-be-made *Judge Dredd* movie, set for release in 1995, which would star Sylvester Stallone as Dredd. A bog standard platformer resulted. It was exceedingly average, yet it was still ten times better than the movie. Drokk.

Another Mega Drive game in the final throes of development was *Ecco: The Tides Of Time*. The Sega exclusive, released also on the Mega-CD, Master System and Game Gear, continued on from the story of the first *Ecco* game and the battle against the Vortex Queen. We thought she had been defeated but no, she follows Ecco to Earth to form a new Vortex hive, and to make the heroic cetacean's life harder she also destroys the Asterite, the object that gave Ecco the power to defeat her in the first game.




» [Mega Drive] Ecco is back again, doing battle with the Vortex Queen while partaking in a spot of time travel…

The Tides Of Time boasted much the same style of gameplay as the original, with a testing puzzle element that was just as severe. The only change was that rather than saving your pod of dolphins you now have to locate the individual parts of the destroyed Asterite. New to the game are level-specific transformations into other animals thanks to Metaspheres. These can be picked up and turn Ecco into a jellyfish, shark or seagull.

Despite its brick hardness, the second *Ecco* title was an enjoyable and immersive game, with its ambient soundtrack and atmospheric graphics.

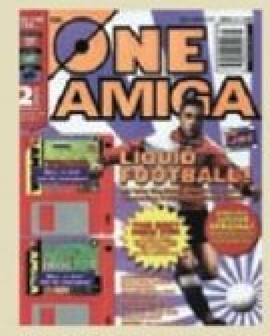
Reviewers at *Mean Machines Sega* had little to work with this month, mainly due to the notoriously quiet summer months being a lean time for big game releases.

The little joy that could be gleaned was from *Dragon Ball Z* (Bandai, Mega Drive), *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* (Virgin, Game Gear), *Sensible Soccer* (Sony Imagesoft, Mega-CD) and *Ecco The Dolphin* (Sega, Master System).

While a gaming drought was taking place for Sega fans, SNES gamers were enjoying monsoon conditions with a deluge of top-rating titles, including *Super Bomberman* (Hudson Soft), *Joe & Mac 2: Lost In The Tropics* (Data East), *The Jungle Book* (Virgin Games), *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* (Virgin Games), *Spectre* (GameTek), *SOS* (Vic Tokai), *World Cup USA 94* (US Gold), *Cotton 100%* (Datem Polystar), *Raccoon Rascal* (NCS Masaya) and *Ranma ½: Hard Battle* (Rumic Soft).

THIS MONTH IN…

THE ONE AMIGA



The One spoke to the team at Graftgold, Andrew Braybrook and Kevin Holloway, about current games development. Andrew's biggest concern was the passing of the one-person project, with games now requiring multiple staff and powerful development tools.



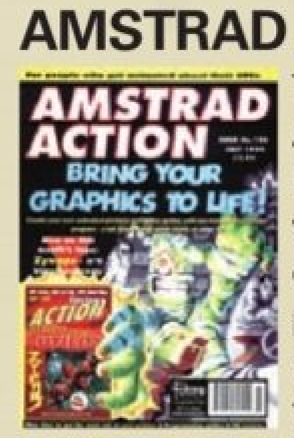
SUPER PLAY



Super Play previewed *Vortex*, a SNES game utilising the Super FX chip. With only a handful of Super FX games available, a new release was always hotly anticipated. This 3D shoot-'em-up saw you pilot a suit that could morph into different modes – think *Iron Man* meets *Transformers* – and looked promising.



AMSTRAD ACTION



The old girl of Amstrad publishing limped onwards, with issue 106 containing just 36 pages. There were no reviews, and the main feature was on CPC fanzines, highlighting *CPC User* and *WACCI* – both of which contained more copy than *AA*.



CHARTS

JULY 1994

MUSIC



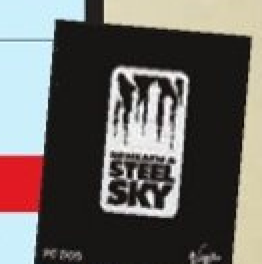
1. Love Is All Around (Wet Wet Wet)
2. I Swear (All-4-One)
3. (Meet) The Flintstones (BC-52s)
4. Grid (Swamp Thing)
5. Crazy For Loose (Let Loose)

SNES



1. Rock N' Roll Racing (Ocean)
2. NBA Jam (Acclaim)
3. Sensible Soccer (Sony)
4. SimCity (Nintendo)
5. Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)

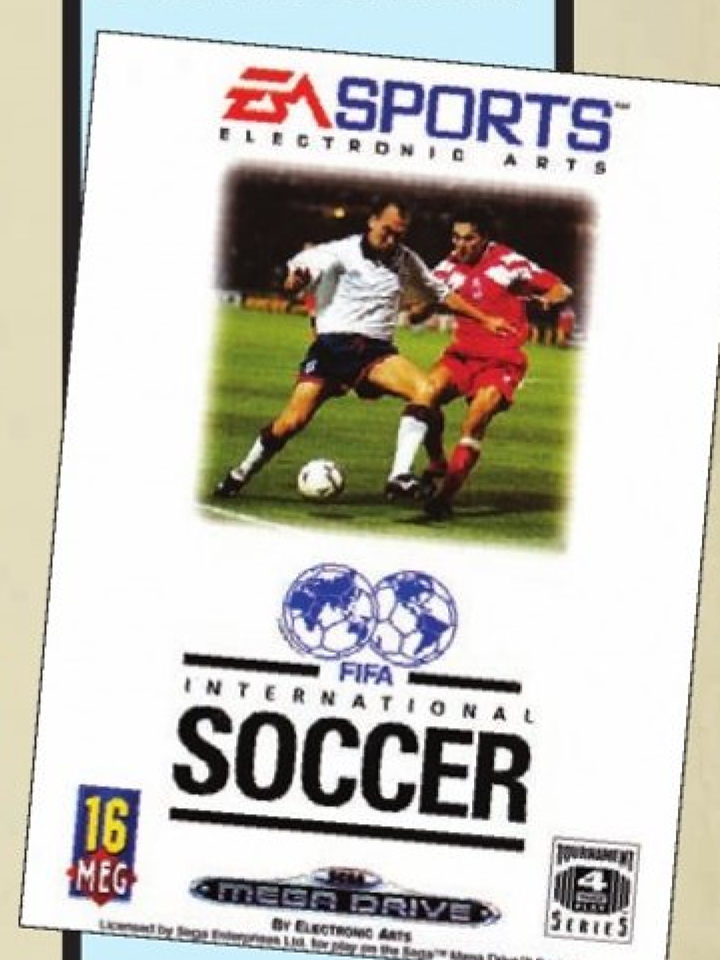
AMIGA



1. Beneath A Steel Sky (Virgin Games)
2. Cannon Fodder (Virgin Games)
3. Liberation (Mindscape)
4. Frontier: Elite 2 (Gametek)
5. Skidmarks (Acid Software)

MEGA DRIVE

1. FIFA International Soccer (Electronic Arts)
2. Sonic 3 (Sega)
3. NBA Jam (Acclaim)
4. Aladdin (Sega)
5. Mortal Kombat (Acclaim)







RETROBATE PROFILE

» NAME: GAVIN EKE
» JOINED: 28 MARCH 2009
» LOCATION: NORWICH
» OCCUPATION: FINANCE
» FAVE GAME SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM

Firelord

STEALING BEAUTY

#44



» ZX SPECTRUM
» HEWSON
» 1986

The name Stephen Crow will be known to many an 8-bit fan. A poll winner in the Programmer Of The Year category, as voted by readers of *Crash Magazine*, Stephen followed his success with this colourful arcade adventure.

Casting you as the knight Sir Galaheart, you had to traverse the cursed kingdom of Torot to obtain the four charms of eternal youth. Once obtained, you would find the wicked queen who stole the firestone from a dragon and exchange it with the four charms she so badly wanted. Apparently, Oil of Olay wasn't doing the trick for the wicked queen. The exchange complete, Torot would be free, returning to happier times of hog roasts and mead.

You required assistance from the townsfolk, who were housebound by angry ghosts that wanted Torot to remain cursed. The people were still keen to trade with you; however, you can be as wicked as the queen and steal goods from the people. This nefarious act was often required to ensure your progress, but get caught and you'll go before a judge. Here you take part in a mini-game which consists of an arrow switching between guilty and innocent. Stop the arrow on guilty and one of your lives is lost.

While items were scattered around the kingdom, they would not be enough to ensure success in your objective. The reason for this was that even a walk in Torot was seemingly bad for you. The mere act of walking would see your health gradually deplete, this is even before the hostile ghosts collar you and reduce it further. Though during your quest you could come by spells that despatched the apparitions, every time you begin a game you're defenceless, making stealing a necessity.

Firelord is a vibrant, quaint and picturesque place. In fact, it's one of the most aesthetically pleasing worlds on the Sinclair, with medieval houses situated within colourful hamlets. I recommend you pay it a visit sometime, but do suggest you learn to steal. In *Firelord*, crime most definitely pays. *



Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net


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05



THE MAKING OF FINAL FANTASY VII

In the mid-Nineties, Square's flagship franchise abandoned Nintendo's hardware and embraced the PlayStation, a move that would lead to Final Fantasy VII, an ambitious, refined and enormously influential RPG. Director Yoshinori Kitase and art director Yusuke Naora discuss the creation of this masterpiece with us in unprecedented depth. Steven Spielberg's Jaws fits into it somewhere, as Samuel Roberts discovers…

Without hyperbole, *Final Fantasy VII* is the RPG that changed the genre. Opening the Western floodgates to Japan's own style of role-playing and popularising the entire sub-genre, the 10-million-plus-selling game was, for many players, their introduction to the potential of interactive storytelling and the first videogame narrative to leave a mark on them. It's also divisive, anecdotally referred to as the most returned game of all time and often criticised by Western RPG veterans – yet such cynicism can't mask the impact it had upon release in 1997. Along with *Gran Turismo*, *Final Fantasy VII* shifted millions of PlayStation consoles by demonstrating the machine's capabilities, captivating gamers with a fictional universe of unrestrained scope and style that would govern an entire corner of the industry. Back when the game was being created, Square (today known as Square Enix) was a company in transition, and the influx of talent that brought *FFVII* into being, as well as a development culture that fostered creativity, was ultimately responsible for this deservedly celebrated RPG.

At the 1995 SIGGRAPH computer graphics convention in Los Angeles, the company formerly known as Square presented an interactive demo to the world that showcased its *Final Fantasy* property in unprecedented fashion. This project







depicted three characters from *Final Fantasy VI* fighting a Golem enemy in full 3D, a jaw-dropping contrast to the SNES-based 2D roots of the game, complete with visual effects and cinematic in-battle camera angles that implied a future beyond the static staging of the series' stories up until that point. When you look at the tech demo now, you can absolutely see the founding technical conceit of *Final Fantasy VII* embedded within it. Squaresoft saw that *Final Fantasy* could be so much more on a platform that allowed the company to experiment with such high-end technical ideas.

The SIGGRAPH project would form the 'seed', as producer and creator Hironobu Sakaguchi dubbed it on a promotional video for the game, of *Final Fantasy*'s move into the next console generation. To any seasoned gamer, the most well-known part of the development of *Final Fantasy VII* is the defection that started it all. Long considered a Nintendo stalwart since the original *Final Fantasy*'s release on the NES in 1987, Square shifted to the PlayStation for its CD-ROM capabilities over the N64's comparatively limited cartridges. This fit the grand ambitions of this new sequel.

"We were fans of Nintendo's hardware, although in order to use CG movies in the game like we intended, we needed a lot of storage space, and for that reason decided on a platform that used the higher-capacity CD media," director Yoshinori Kitase tells us.

How ironic that this franchise would soar on a Sony platform, given that Nintendo publicly broke away from a CD-enabled SNES collaboration with the electronics giant earlier in the decade. The emerging disc format enabled *Final Fantasy VII* to be far more cinematic than its forebears – an important factor, especially to Sakaguchi. Yet an interesting factor in all this was the set of technical influences on the team, many of whom were from Western game development, as Kitase explains to us: "We looked at trends in the foreign-made PC games of the time, such as *Alone In The Dark* and *Heart Of Darkness* [and so on], and made it our objective to combine together smooth action sequences using polygon-based characters and clever camera work with the insertion of effective CG movies at a high level. I believe that we pretty much achieved our goals in this regard."

When it came to setting and story, *Final Fantasy VII* would similarly be a departure from series convention. While the previous entry in the series had a pronounced steampunk theme, the set of environments in the seventh game would vary massively from continent to continent, from a vast, polluted metropolis to backwater towns; that clash of

DISTRACTIONS

The best of Final Fantasy VII's many extra tasks and mini-games



Chocobos

Catching them, riding them, racing them and breeding them – the Chocobo element of *FFVII* is a game in itself, and becomes bewilderingly complex when you're looking to breed that lucrative Gold Chocobo, which can reach parts of the map that even the Highwind cannot.



Battle on Fort Condor

Visiting Fort Condor triggers this intriguing little strategy offshoot, where you fund small skirmishes to hold back Shinra forces from the giant bird perched atop the fort. It's no *Age Of Empires*, but it shows how diverse the ideas are in *FFVII*.



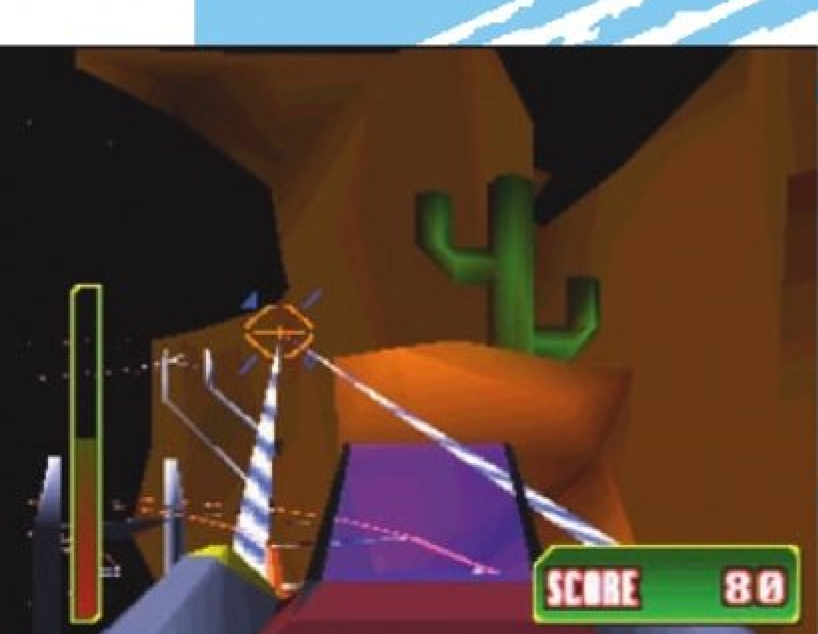
Snowboarding

On the second disc, Cloud gets the opportunity to snowboard down a mountain. Later in the game, it re-emerges as a tricky arcade game at Gold Saucer's Wonder Square. This mini-game was popular enough to justify a mobile spin-off, which is naturally only available in Japan.



Motorcycle Chase

One of the nicest surprises early on is an action-based mini-game where you have to protect your comrades from Shinra soldiers on bikes by ramming them off the road with Cloud's inexplicably large Buster Sword. It's great fun.



First-person Shooting

Visiting the 'Speed' part of Gold Saucer triggers this bizarre but quite impressive first-person shooter section, where hitting a high score lands you a prize. This is notable for its kaleidoscopic visuals, in stark contrast to much of the game.



Battle arena

The only way to get Cloud's Omnislash Limit Break outside of the finale, and a clever means of extending the combat's appeal, the battle arena on Gold Saucer is a relentless challenge where you have to survive successive rounds of enemies and status ailments.



FINAL FANTASY VII'S UNSUNG HERO

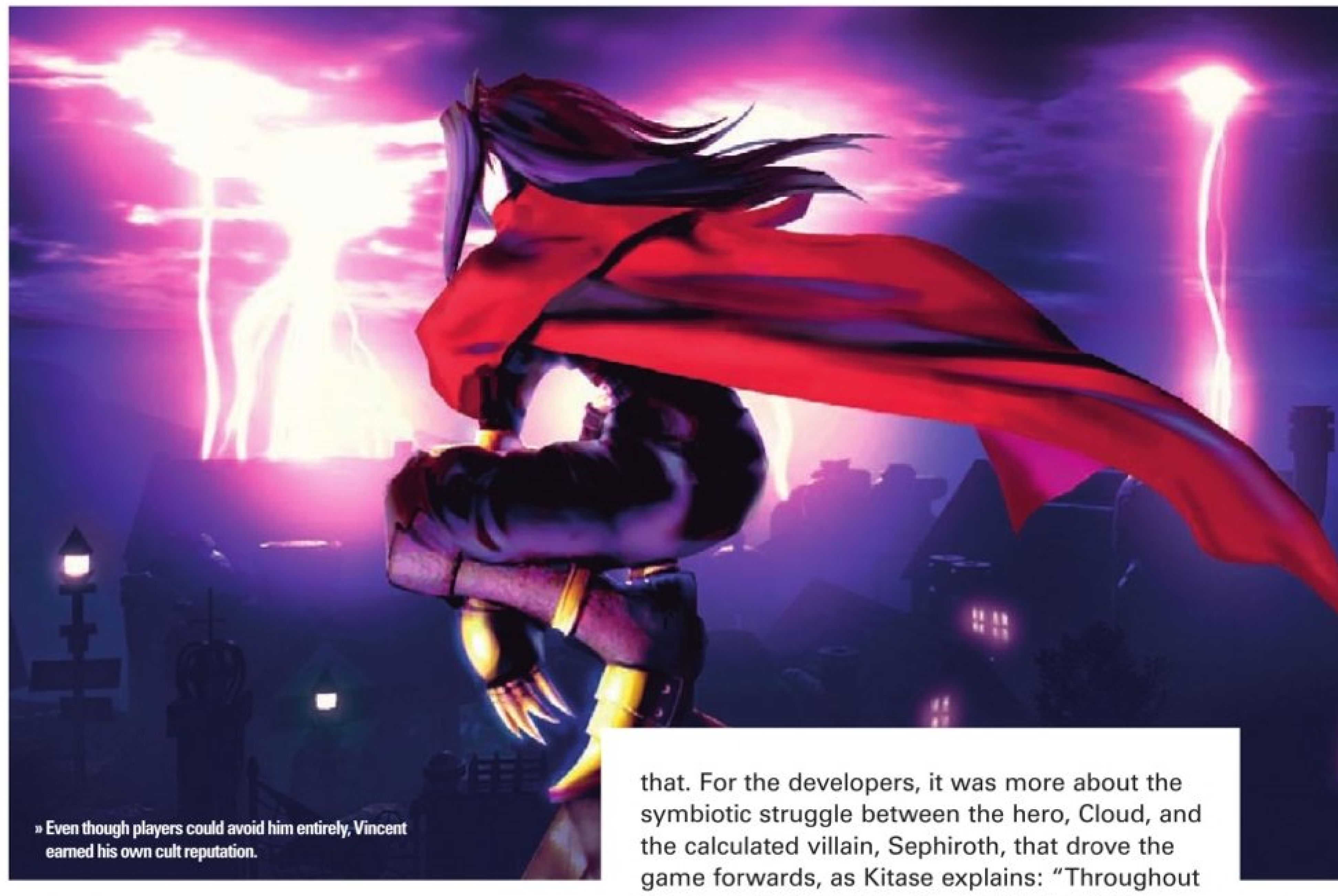
Kitase weighs in on the oddly high popularity of Zack Fair, Cloud's former mentor

As you may recall, the entire flashback sequence where Cloud remembers the events in Nibelheim that led to Sephiroth's transformation into a twisted enemy turns out to be a bit different. Later, we learn that Cloud confused himself with Zack, his superior in the army. Ever since then, Zack has remained a popular figure among *Final Fantasy* fans, which led to the spin-off *Crisis Core*. His role in Cloud's story makes him a unique element in *FFVII*'s tangled web.

"Zack is the vessel onto which Cloud twistedly projects his complexes towards SOLDIER [Shinra's elite fighting force]," Kitase tells us. "He was created by the scenario writer, [Kazushige Nojima], as he was trying to build up the mystery surrounding Cloud's past, and we did not originally think of Zack as a major character, but he seemed to be strangely popular with the fans. Much later on, Zack featured heavily in *Crisis Core*, and Mr Nojima was in charge of the scenario for both titles. When he first created Zack, I doubt that he could possibly have thought that we would be delving into the same character's story ten years on!"

» [PSone] *Final Fantasy VII*'s Materia system is so deep that it can eventually transform the entire rhythm of a battle, by letting you alter the conditions of it.





» Even though players could avoid him entirely, Vincent earned his own cult reputation.

futuristic technology against these remnants of a beautiful old world.

We asked Kitase to discuss the inspirations for the planet's creation, and he graciously passed our questions on to *FFVII*'s art director, Yusuke Naora. "Initially we wanted to try something new by having a corporation as the major enemy while still keeping the game broadly in the fantasy genre," he explains, referring to the Shinra Electric Power Company. "Having decided on this concept, we actively included many steampunk-like elements to try to merge the appeal of traditional high-fantasy 'brick-built' structures and sci-fi elements at a high level. However, as there was to be magic present in this world, it would have been hard to have cyberpunk-esque unknown future technology sitting comfortably with the other influences, so we tried to keep that aspect down as much as possible."

Naora continues: "On the design side, we were also very much inspired to mix in things from many different periods in a semi-chaotic manner, including things from our everyday lives such as the newer buildings in Tokyo, the streets of Ginza, and the Shibuya station building." All this led to a laudably diverse set of environments, which still felt like a cohesive part of the same world.

The setting was closely connected to the narrative – the backdrop of *Final Fantasy VII*'s story is that the planet is suffering, being mined of resources by the ruthless Shinra, which is also a prominent military force. Yet the central conflict of the story is actually smaller-scale than that. For the developers, it was more about the symbiotic struggle between the hero, Cloud, and the calculated villain, Sephiroth, that drove the game forwards, as Kitase explains: "Throughout the story I really wanted to depict Sephiroth as an overwhelmingly powerful threat. However, if you have a villain as an actual opponent who appears before the heroes then however strong or charismatic you make the character, he will still feel very much 'life-sized' and limited in scope, reduced to another minor evil."

What source of inspiration helped the team tackle this issue? You'd be surprised. Kitase continues: "To solve this problem, I decided to present Sephiroth indirectly, making the player aware of his existence through hints and stories but not having him show himself before them much. The player sees the aftermath of his ruthless deeds but does not arrive at the source of the evil for a long time. This was the same method used by Steven Spielberg in the film *Jaws*. Finding the butchered President Shinra on the top floor of the Shinra building and the impaled body of the Midgar Zolom are moments symbolic of this approach."

Players don't properly encounter Sephiroth until they're around ten hours in, and even then it's in fleeting glimpses – we see him prominently in flashbacks, leading to the discovery about his sad origins and subsequent breakdown. He, along with the attached musical theme, *One-Winged Angel*, would become iconic aspects of *FFVII* upon release. Cloud, the amnesiac hero trying to piece his distressing memories back together, was an equal point of fascination for players. It's this dynamic, with their subsequently explored

"We made it our objective to combine smooth action sequences with CG movies at a high level"



history of bloodshed and trauma, that players hadn't seen before in *Final Fantasy*. "Furthermore, however far the player pursues him, Sephiroth is always just out of reach, and because of this our image of him becomes more and more idolised and idealised," explains Kitase. "This story structure also overlaps with the reasons that Cloud has such a complex about his own past, and I believe it is an effective tool for showing the relationship between the two characters."

All the character designs and their personalities were left in the hands of the designers, a break from previous games, where Sakaguchi would oversee their conception. This was also the first project where Tetsuya Nomura would be the sole character designer, who, having contributed work to *Final Fantasy V* and *VI*, replaced Yoshitaka Amano from the previous titles. A *Famitsu* interview with Nomura (translated by Andriasang) explains that Cloud was essentially his creation, yet Kitase told us that determining both the looks and personalities of every one of *Final Fantasy VII*'s iconic cast of characters was "largely the responsibility of [Nomura]". It marked a sea change for the series. Gone were the primarily medieval, dreamy heroes of Amano, and in came a fresh, exciting array of heroes that would have an extensive impact on Japanese popular culture – not to mention birth a string of ideas that would be appropriated into character clichés, like spiky hair and giant swords. Amano would still contribute character sketches and the iconic meteor logo, however.

The immense back story for these heroes and villains was fine-tuned by scenario writer Kazushige Nojima, while many of the actual narrative ideas came from a unique exercise that once again showed Squaresoft's experimental approach. "When designing the game, we asked all staff on the *Final Fantasy* team to submit possible episode ideas for character back stories and created the overall stories by putting these together," says Kitase. "It was the scenario writer, Mr Nojima, who managed to put together a complete and detailed story from this massive pool of ideas, a process that was much like putting together a jigsaw puzzle."

This exercise led to an intriguing collection of stories across the cast of heroes, with one main plot driving it all: the planet's impending destruction at the hands of Sephiroth, where he would harness the world's natural defences – known as the Lifestream – for himself. The cast of *Final Fantasy VII*, including the tortured, unfocused Barret; last of an ancient race Aeris (or Aerith – a misspelling in the game's translation, as you probably know); and down-and-out pilot Cid Highwind; as well as more esoteric faces like the tomb-dwelling, optional companion Vincent Valentine, struck a chord with gamers, as their stories dovetailed skilfully with the main narrative.

These small tales, even Sephiroth's, traced back to the all-encompassing Shinra plot device – this corporation that is draining the planet of its resources. Given that *Final Fantasy VII* was made in the mid-Nineties, you could draw obvious

THE GREATEST MOMENTS OF FINAL FANTASY VII

Not featuring Cloud in a dress

That death...

You knew it would be this – shocking, sad and brilliant on the part of the Squaresoft team, a certain character is murdered by Sephiroth at the climax of the game's first act. It's notable because it is so brutal, but this brave move to take the character out of the story meant *Final Fantasy VII* would be forever remembered by players.

Omnislash

The entire game builds to this final conflict between Cloud and Sephiroth, where the hero slices down the grey-haired villain in spectacular fashion, using his final Limit Break, Omnislash. All right, so it isn't necessarily the first time you use Omnislash, but it's still a thrilling component of the game's conclusion.

The Weapons emerge out of the crater

Sephiroth unleashes Weapons on the planet, giant boss-style creatures that, when put together, look like something out of a Japanese monster movie. The idea of the optional super-boss is a *Final Fantasy* staple – here, they're made a key turning point in the story, in another example of Square's pioneering FMVs.

500 years later...

After the credits, we're treated to this brilliant but somehow chilling scene, 500 years into the future. We see Nanaki and his children running through a canyon, before emerging onto a vista that shows an abandoned Midgar, overgrown and free of the technology that drained the life of the planet.

The President is dead

When Kitase alludes to *Jaws*, he's referring to this scene where the player reaches the top of Shinra Headquarters and finds the President dead, impaled by Sephiroth's katana. It's a brilliant way to bring the villain into the story, having him lurk just out of reach.

Summoning Knights of the Round

Knights of the Round was easily the most lavish summon spell in the entire series up until that point. The animation for the attack, Ultimate End, sees 13 knights battering the enemy with a slew of extraordinarily powerful moves; a just reward for the exhausting process of breeding a Gold Chocobo to get it.

Sephiroth walks into the flames

The highlight of the entire Nibelheim flashback, told from the village of Kalm early on in the story, is an eye-opening cinematic where Sephiroth turns away from Cloud into the flames, after the twisted warrior burns the town to the ground. Perhaps the most visually recognisable part of the game.

Zack and Cloud escape Nibelheim

In this flashback, the events of the Nibelheim incident are fully disclosed. We learn that Cloud borrowed Zack's identity, and that this member of SOLDIER was gunned down by Shinra outside Midgar. This sequence is made all the more sad when you've earlier encountered Zack's parents in the town of Gongaga, where both his mother and father are completely unaware of his tragic fate.

Emerald Weapon swims out of the darkness

Late into the third disc, heading into the ocean with the submarine gives the player a few surprises, including the final whereabouts of the Turks, Shinra's agents whose paths cross yours throughout. That's before you see bubbles emerge out of the black, though – when the fearsome Emerald Weapon drifts towards you in terrifying fashion. Brr! It's an absolute bitch to kill, too.

Getting the Highwind

Final Fantasy as a series is ingenious in the way it lets you manoeuvre around the world. When you get the Highwind, you can go almost anywhere in the entire world, a gloriously freeing reminder of the diversity of locations within the game.

parallels with the real-world environmental issues at that time. Yet environmentalism, surprisingly, was not part of the team's storytelling agenda, Kitase explains: "We did not particularly plan on bringing out environmental destruction as a major theme of the game but rather intended the story to depict the internal struggles of Cloud and Sephiroth.

"However, if pushed I would say that this theme was not so much that of concern over destruction of the environment but more about how we wanted to show how civilisation and the environment coexist. Cloud and his companions first appear in the game as a group trying to take down the Mako reactors, but in the end we see them getting help from the Lifestream that is the source of that energy, and going forward into a future of coexistence with the planet. I believe that this theme of how we can strike a balance and live in harmony with the environment is one that is shared by all of us."

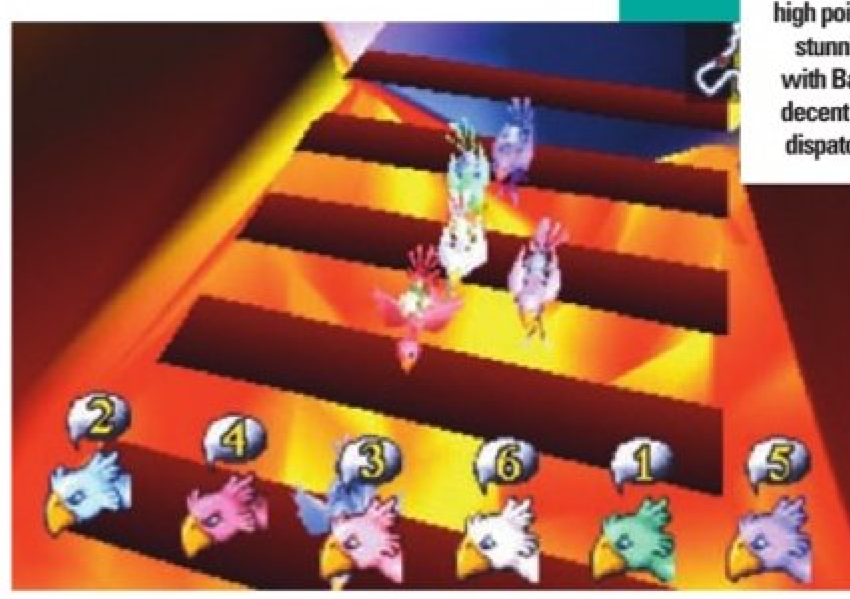
The Lifestream is the literal embodiment of the planet's energy, where all life emerges from and where it returns to with death. Its genesis came from Sakaguchi, who had come up with the idea as a reaction to tragic events in his own life. "When we were creating *Final Fantasy III*, my mother passed away," he said in a video to coincide with *FFVII*'s release. "And ever since, I have been thinking about the theme of life. Life exists in many things, and I was curious about what would happen if I attempted to examine life in a mathematical and logical way; maybe this was my approach in overcoming the grief I was experiencing."

With that delicate balance in mind, an antagonistic force like Shinra seemed suitable – it also presented a fine opportunity to go against the curve of the last six games. "We had a feeling that ideas for villains in RPGs had kind of become stale and repetitive, with it always being something like a massive dragon or an evil ruler who had acquired an ancient power," says Kitase. "When we asked ourselves what a more modern take on a powerful evil would be, we came up with the idea of a corporation that pollutes the environment for excessive profit."

The most talked-about moment in this complex tale, though, would be the death of a major character. One of the conditions of running our exclusive interview from Square Enix was that we wouldn't reveal this character's name – but you know which one we're talking about. Everyone knows it. You might



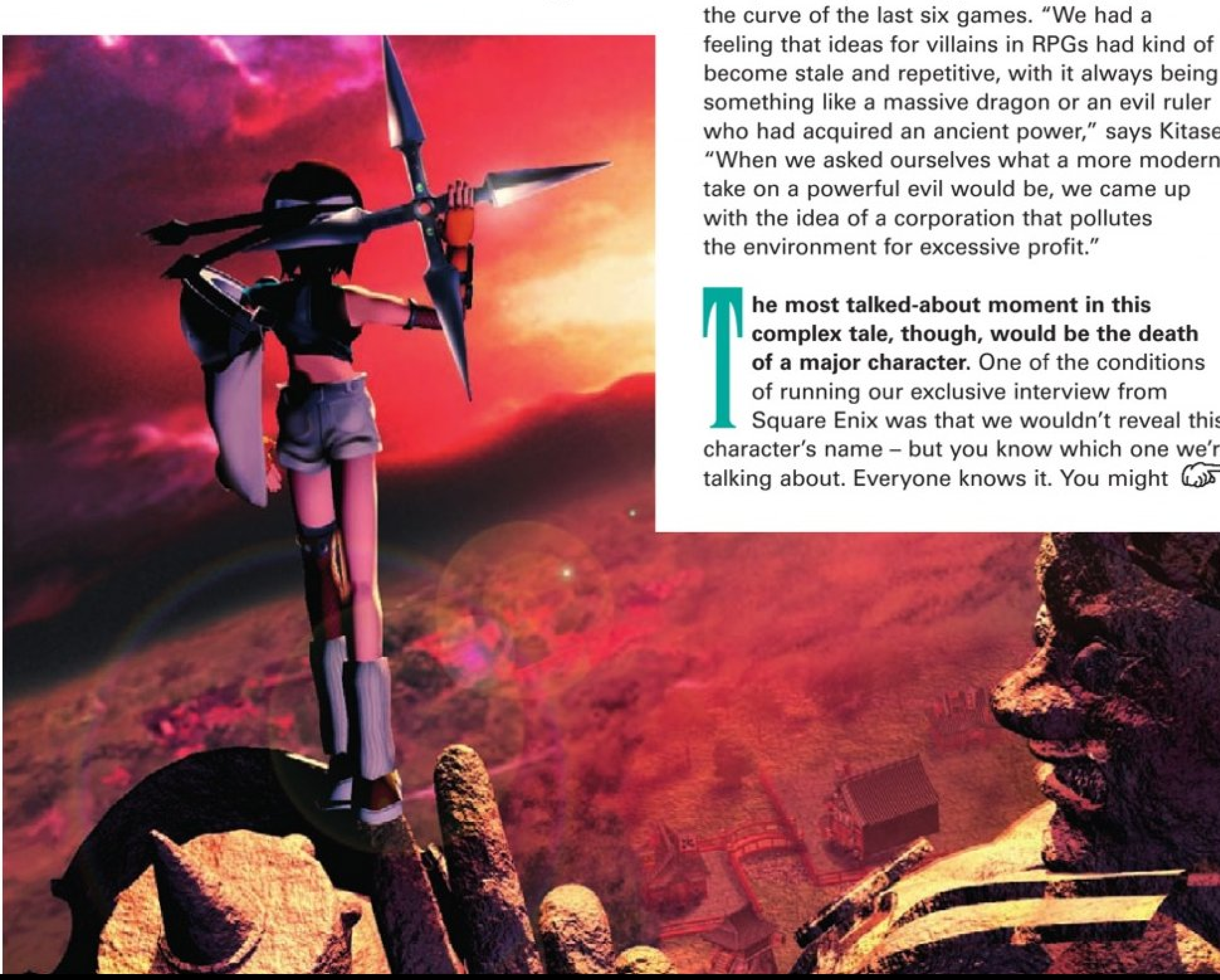






» [Top left] Catching and breeding Chocobos is one of the true tests of *Final Fantasy VII*.
» [Bottom right] *FFVII* is a high point for the series' stunning creatures, with Bahamut being a decent means of lazily dispatching enemies.

"Sephiroth is always just out of reach, and so our image of him becomes more and more idolised"



RANDY PITCHFORD
CEO, Gearbox Software



"**Obviously, role-playing** games were a huge influence on *Borderlands*. *Final Fantasy* offered many of the standards and tropes that are borrowed by many role-playing games of today. The engagement and motivation that comes from levelling up and the draw of collecting loot first became clear to all of us when we did such things with pencil-and-paper games. While many PC games applied these principles, *Final Fantasy* managed to capture the design in a most accessible way at a time when our controllers had only a D-pad and two buttons. The elegance of the *Final Fantasy* approach to role-playing has inspired a generation.

In fact, the very first videogame that my wife and I played together from beginning to end was the first *Final Fantasy* game on the NES. To this day, we have fond memories of that experience and an irrational loyalty to the franchise. I know that many people see *Final Fantasy VII* as the high-water mark for the series, but for me it was the earlier *Final Fantasy* games on the NES and Super Nintendo that have had the most impact."

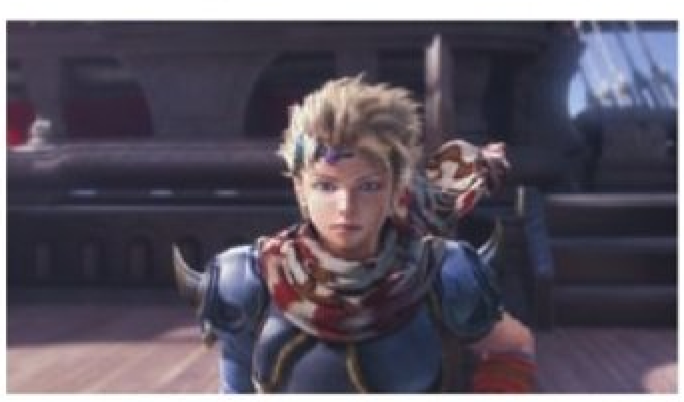
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT…

SEQUELS IN FINAL FANTASY



Final Fantasy X-2

Solid and technically superb but tonally misfiring, *Final Fantasy X-2* took *FFX*'s timid protagonist, Yuna, then popped on some hot pants and gave her a couple of guns. The game's 'Perfect' ending is almost worth playing through it alone for fans of the first game, though.



Final Fantasy IV: The After Years

Originally released on mobiles in Japan, then through WiiWare and again on the PSP with *Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection*, *The After Years* is a direct sequel that is built with the look of the original SNES title. The PSP version presents it in the most coherent, beautiful form.



Dissidia 012 [Duodecim] Final Fantasy

Forget the stupid title. Aside from the unfortunate shortage of new content, this sequel to the fan-service-packed original is a top-notch action RPG that was snubbed last year, no doubt affected by the PSP's atrocious piracy rates. Nevertheless, it comes packaged with the first game, so get it if you have the chance.

have spent hours training this character up before the event occurred. It didn't matter. This character was wiped out of the story. Such a brave decision would be the defining moment, and it stunned this new generation of JRPG fans, and is still the subject of much conversation today.

It is odd that Square Enix declined to comment on the sequence, having done so in the past – even Kitase himself, back in 2003. It could be that the company is hoping new gamers discover *Final Fantasy VII* through the PlayStation Store, or that something new involving the game is in the pipeline. Either way, that moment was designed by Square to create a sudden void in the player, to make them think they'd have acted differently were they to know it was coming.

There are more surprises besides, though. A major plot point some way into the game sees the threat level raised significantly as giant creatures, a super-boss motif of the series known as Weapons, march into the overworld and heighten the drama of the closing act. The Emerald and Ruby Weapons are especially tough to beat, yet incorporating these powerful entities as part of the Sephiroth storyline imbued them with a new importance. Kitase explains why the team opted to do this: "In all *Final Fantasy* games, we always put in very powerful monsters in the latter parts of the game to challenge dedicated players and to deepen the gameplay experience, enhancing the longevity of the title and giving something to do aside from the main quest. We had already got the concept of the Weapons as defenders of the planet for *FFVII* and so decided to tie that together with these play-enhancing features."

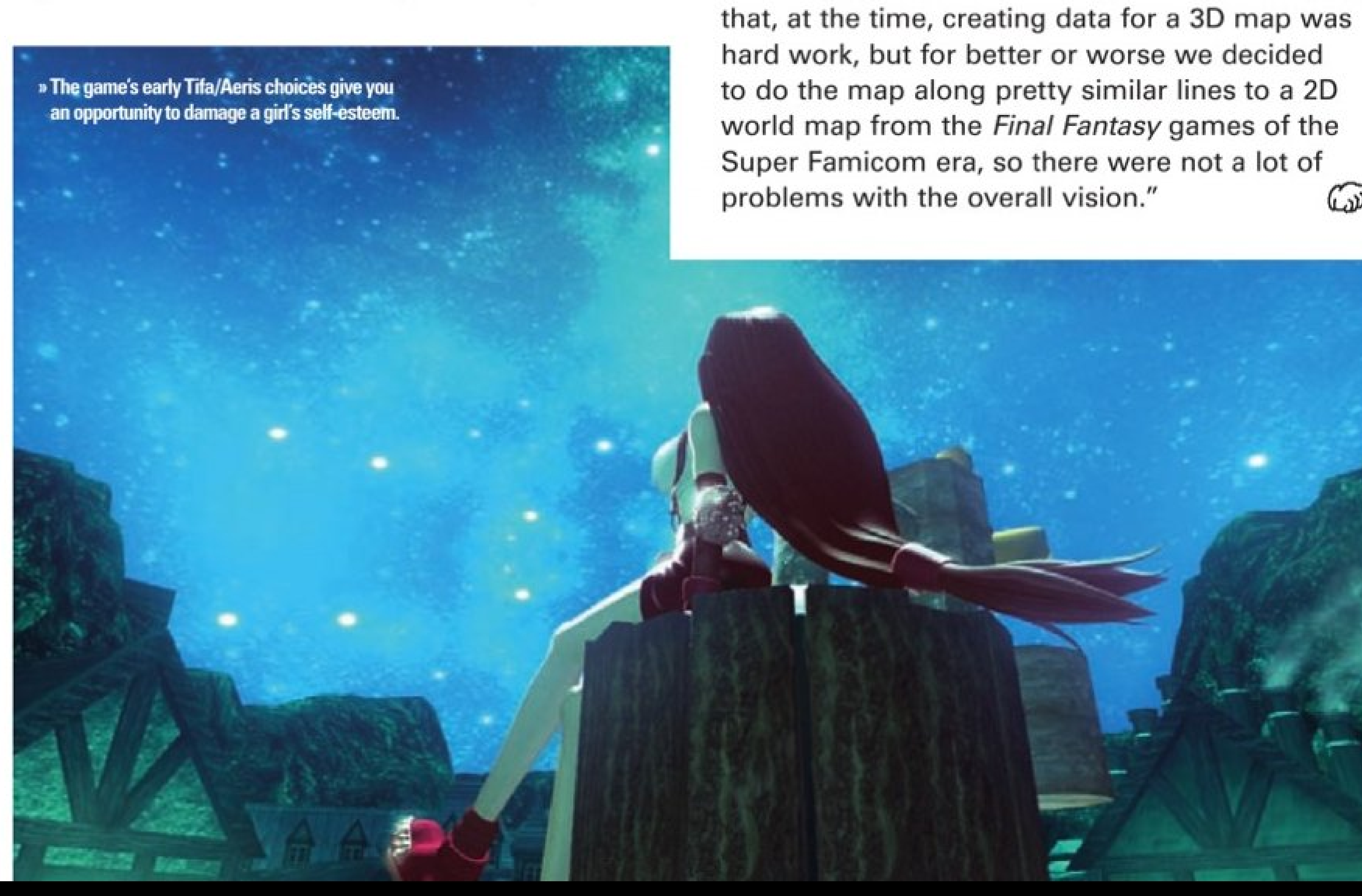
"When thinking about a modern take on a powerful evil, we came up with the idea of a corporation"

But the story, despite forever being the guiding light for the *Final Fantasy* series, was matched by *FFVII*'s immense technical and mechanical advances. Creating a masterpiece of this calibre, with such scope in setting and the jaw-dropping amount of iconography that would define Japanese RPGs from there on, was the product of a talented group of people, sharing a potent creative culture. We asked Kitase about the team's dynamic at the time.

"Before *FFVII* we only really had 2D pixel art designers, but for this project many 3D CG specialists and designers came in from outside the company, leading to an interaction of various working cultures that was very stimulating," he says. "All the in-house designers also started to learn to use CG tools, and we held a lot of seminars and explanation meetings. I personally received instruction in how to use Alias PowerAnimator, and around a tenth of all the character motions seen in the game's event scenes were actually created by me!"

We had to ask Kitase if anything changed in development – and, as it happens, Square had a relatively airtight vision of *FFVII*, with only one change that fans will definitely have noticed. "The only thing that we had to change during development was the level of deformation on the characters. The fact that the characters are depicted at different levels of deformation in the field, battle and CG sections is a remnant of these changes." Whereas field characters ended up being blocky 3D models, the characters in battle had far more detail. As Kitase mentions, too, you can see this difference in CG movies – some depict the characters in blocky form, while others, like Sephiroth before the flames of Nibelheim, are more impressively realised. It's a curious inconsistency, but of course forgivable in the face of the finished product's other achievements.

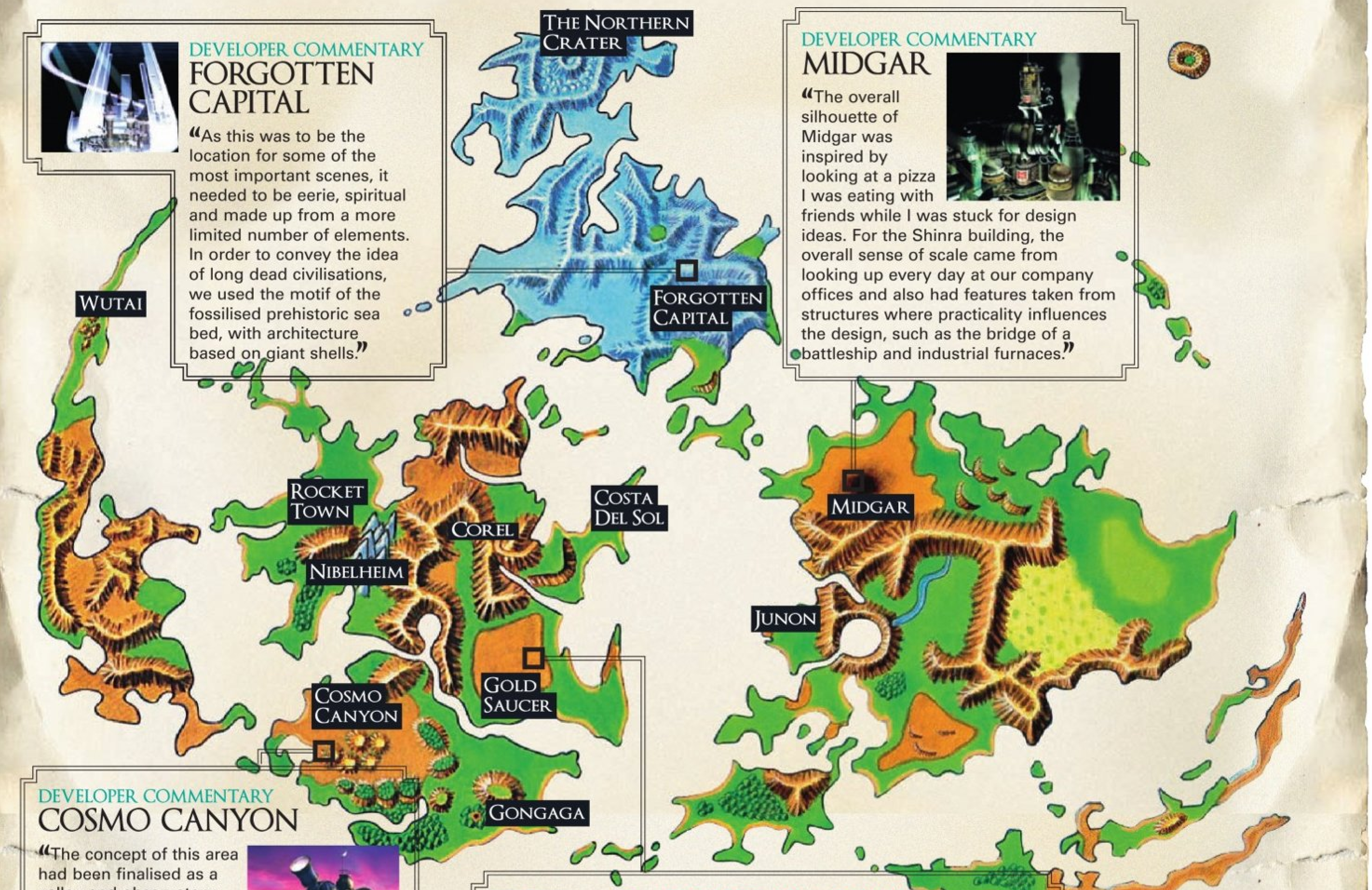
The locations have aged better, thanks to the heavy use of prerendered backgrounds. Yet part of *Final Fantasy VII*'s appeal to long-time fans was the introduction of a fully 3D world map. Despite the cinematic touches present in other parts of the experience, the world map was seen as an updated version of the SNES overworld. "This part of the game was not actually all that much of a challenge," says Kitase. "It goes without saying that, at the time, creating data for a 3D map was hard work, but for better or worse we decided to do the map along pretty similar lines to a 2D world map from the *Final Fantasy* games of the Super Famicom era, so there were not a lot of problems with the overall vision."



» The game's early Tifa/Aeris choices give you an opportunity to damage a girl's self-esteem.

THIS PLANET AS MY VESSEL

With insight from Final Fantasy VII's art director, Yusuke Naora, we pick out key locations from the story



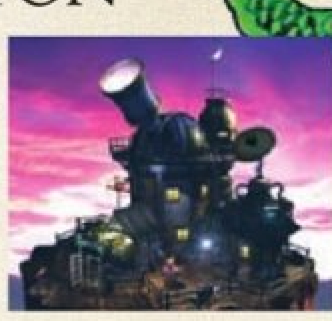
DEVELOPER COMMENTARY
FORGOTTEN CAPITAL

"As this was to be the location for some of the most important scenes, it needed to be eerie, spiritual and made up from a more limited number of elements. In order to convey the idea of long dead civilisations, we used the motif of the fossilised prehistoric sea bed, with architecture based on giant shells."

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY
MIDGAR

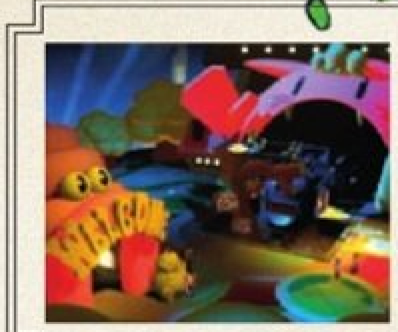
"The overall silhouette of Midgar was inspired by looking at a pizza I was eating with friends while I was stuck for design ideas. For the Shinra building, the overall sense of scale came from looking up every day at our company offices and also had features taken from structures where practicality influences the design, such as the bridge of a battleship and industrial furnaces."

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY
COSMO CANYON



"The concept of this area had been finalised as a valley and observatory like the Grand Canyon, so I had the designers put in more of a medieval feel, with fantasy elements such as the clockwork 'cosmic spheres' planetarium and the gyroscope compass."

DEVELOPER COMMENTARY
GOLD SAUCER



"As there were a lot of mini-games in the title, I set the question of, 'What would an amusement park in this world be like?' and made sure everyone had fun when designing this area."

□ JUNON
A port town that is also a military base, Junon is attacked later on by Sapphire Weapon, where the giant Junon cannon ceremoniously takes it down.

□ THE NORTHERN CRATER
This is where Jenova landed about 2,000 years before the start of the story – a creepy, expansive crater where the climax of the game takes place.

□ NIBELHEIM
As more observant players will know, after Nibelheim was burnt down by Sephiroth, the entire town was rebuilt by Shinra and the citizens replaced with its employees in a cover-up.

□ COSTA DEL SOL
An utterly bizarre, Spanish-style holiday town with a relaxed atmosphere, players could later buy an overpriced house in this pleasantly different part of the world map.

□ GONGAGA
This sad little town is the location of an exploded Mako reactor, with the citizens mourning their lost. Like a sister town of Nibelheim, in a strange way.

□ WUTAI
A more culturally differentiated locale to everywhere else, Wutai is the sole town on the far western continent, and marks the only location where the heroes team up with the Turks.

□ COREL
Barret's hometown-turned-post-Shinra-wreck, this is where you can catch the lift to the far more jolly Gold Saucer. There's a ruddy superb chase sequence here later in the game, too.

□ ROCKET TOWN
Built around a launchpad, this is where one of the more interesting characters, foul-mouthed pilot Cid Highwind, hails from. It's a cheerful moment when they finally get the rocket into space.



» Aeris is the most innocent character in the story, and remains massively popular with fans.

Instead, the team had to spend more time worrying about the individual locations themselves, which were significantly more imaginative than their cartridge-based forebears. "It was actually a lot harder and took much more work realising the fully rendered backdrops for the towns and dungeons, as nothing like these had ever been done before at the time. Having said this, the world map in *FFVII* did play a very important role in the game. After the first part, which is spent in the oppressive and cramped environment of Midgar, the feeling of liberation and freedom at the moment when you step out onto the world map is one of the game's most memorable highlights." That's completely true, and this was a stone's throw from making it into our list of favourite moments. *FFVII* progressively puts more power in the player's hands through the way they interact with the world.

Random battles would remain part of the series, but as directed by the SIGGRAPH presentation, the actual look of them marked an exciting leap between generations. "We had decided on the idea of battles in 3D, with the camera panning and zooming around the action, from before beginning development on *FFVII*. In 1995, we created a prototype game based on doing the battles from *FFVI* in 3D and showcased it at the SIGGRAPH convention that year. This test game was made with an eye to perfecting the idea for the battles in *FFVII*."

Aided by the straightforward yet endlessly customisable Materia-based ability system, as well as visually extravagant Limit Break attacks, the combat in *Final Fantasy VII* would never become a chore. This title also saw the best work of composer Nobuo Uematsu, building on his incredible music in *FFVI* with a series of stunning and highly memorable themes and leitmotifs. Any poignant, dark or pleasant instance is helped along enormously by his work, and he made an easy collaborator for Square. "We basically just showed Mr Uematsu the character designs and the scenario, and had him familiarise with the overall themes and images of the game before letting him loose. There were no specific detailed requests, and he was allowed to create the score comparatively freely," says Kitase.

"It took a lot of work realising the rendered backdrops, as nothing like them had been done before"

While HD technology and high-capacity storage media has let Square Enix realise the most elaborate of visions with *Final Fantasy*, there is something pure about the seventh game. It's such a well-rounded experience that it's obviously the product of a developer at a peak of creativity. Being the first *Final Fantasy* released in Europe, and armed with a slightly misleading marketing campaign that focused on FMVs over gameplay, it turned a historically marginalised genre into an international phenomenon.

That's why there's always talk of a remake. Yet gamers clamouring for this must surely realise the potential for disappointment – *Final Fantasy VII* was a product of the CD-ROM era, and everything was built on that foundation. To try to replicate that in today's HD landscape would be a fun curio, sure, but we're almost certain that it wouldn't surpass the original.

Still, the constant talk of revisiting the game is a testament to gamers' attachment to this world, to these characters, and to the themes of identity, life and death that no other entry in the series has matched. It is a masterpiece, born in the midst of Square enjoying the technological revolution laid before it, and justifiably becoming synonymous with the PlayStation platform. For the company, the project was a risk that paid off supremely, but more profoundly for *FFVII*'s receptive audience, it showed them that videogames could offer a journey beyond that of any other medium.

Special thanks to Roxana Etemad for her huge amount of help with this feature.



CONSTANTIN JUPP
Assistant producer, Media Molecule

"*Final Fantasy VII* made me realise that games were so much more than just running or shooting or fighting. Far from mindless entertainment, they could actually stir emotion within the player. It's the game that inspired me to join the games industry and help create those experiences for others."

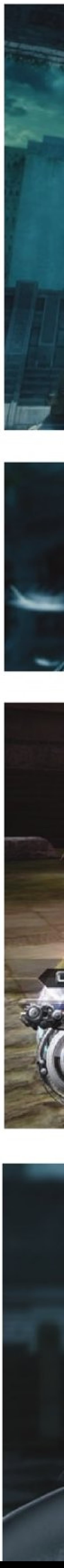




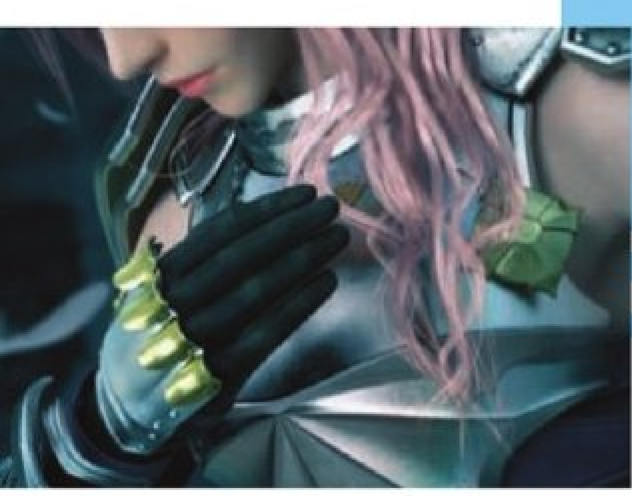




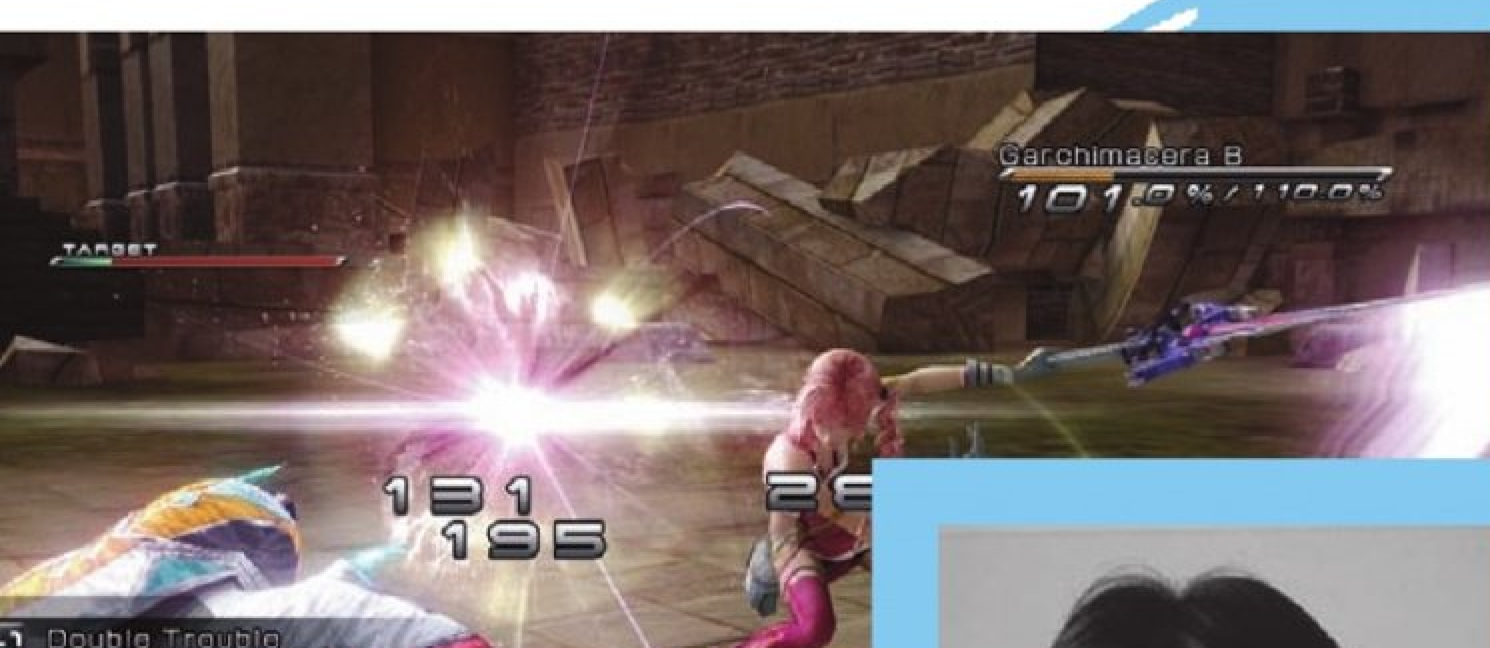
» [Top right] The Forgotten Capital is a bizarre locale, and is still the most atmospheric part of this world.
» [Bottom left] Dressing Cloud up as a woman to impress Don Corneo is still bloody weird.











The Mini Making Of

FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

Yoshinori Kitase discusses Final Fantasy XIII-2, the sequel to the most controversial Final Fantasy entry yet



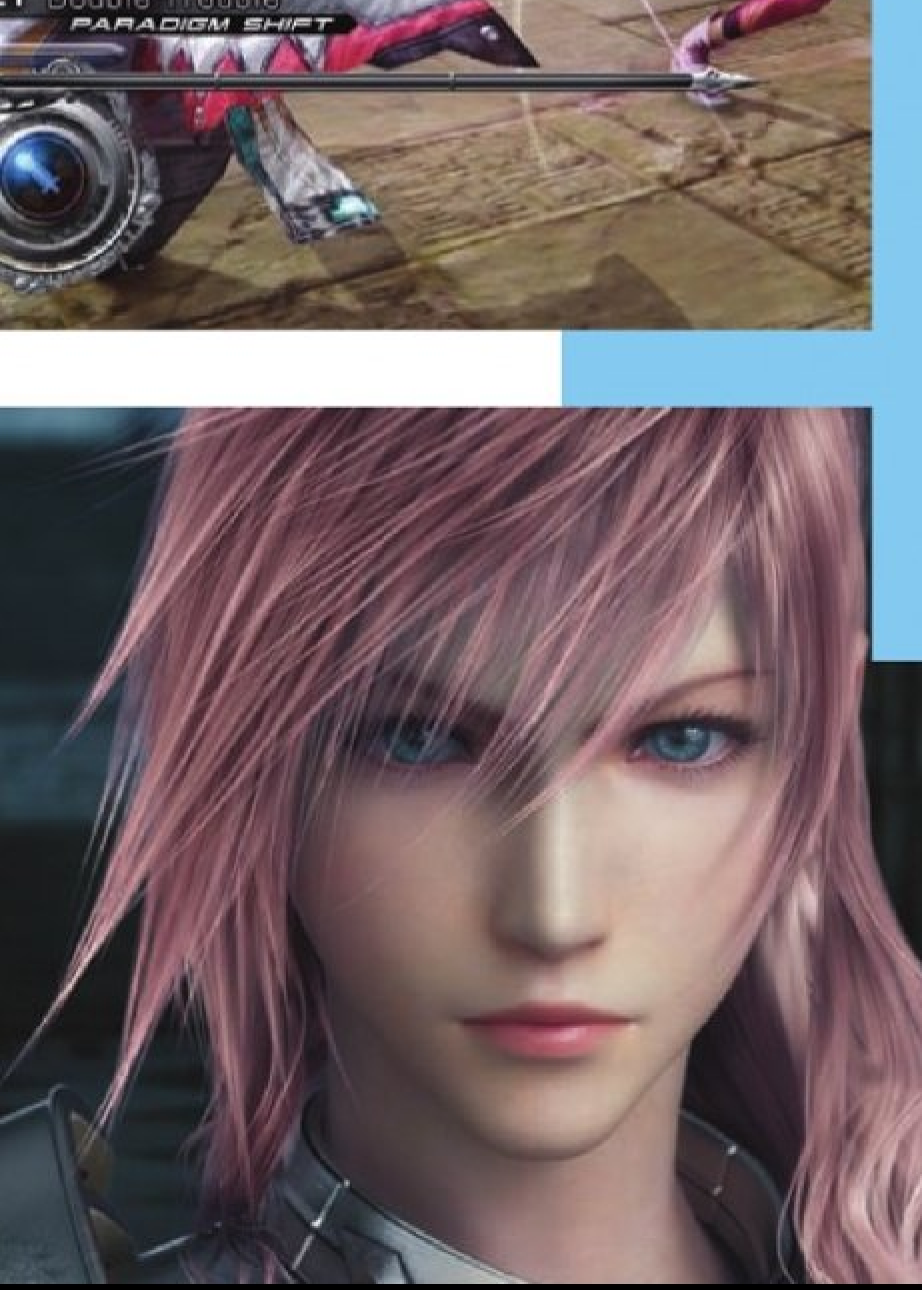
With 20 hours spent on a linear path and no hub areas to explore, *Final Fantasy XIII* was perhaps the first of the numbered games to show that the series wasn't invulnerable to criticism and heated fan response. Indeed, with the growing prominence of Western RPGs, and even being slammed by BioWare, Square Enix felt it had to address those aspects that not everyone adored.

"After the original title went on sale, we received a lot of feedback from around the world and have endeavoured to address the points raised as far as we can," Kitase says. "In *XIII-2*, exploration elements play an important role in the field and story sections."

In *Final Fantasy XIII-2*, the rebellious heroine of *FFXIII*, Lightning, has disappeared to another realm, while her sister, Serah Farron, lives on without her as the world comes under threat. Though the combat system remains pretty much identical – players can now recruit monsters to aid in battle, though – the addition of QTEs and non-linear hub levels are designed to answer all those folks who decried *FFXIII*.



It's an extremely quick turnaround for a *Final Fantasy* game, given that it'll be released under two years since *FFXIII*. *XIII-2*, remarkably, will have been announced and released while spin-off title *Versus XIII*, announced in 2006, is still nowhere near completion. "The original *FFXIII* was the first title we ever did in HD, and so there were many challenges that we had to face head-on," Kitase says. "However, for the sequel we have now built up the required know-how and could make a much more accurate assessment of the working hours required for each aspect of the project, meaning that the creation process runs much more efficiently."



The mistake with Square Enix's last direct videogame sequel in the series, 2003's *Final Fantasy X-2*, was that it drastically switched the tone from the original. Kitase says that won't be a concern this time: "Unlike with *X* and *X-2*, for *XIII-2* we are pretty much maintaining the same style and atmosphere from the original. There are Chocobos and Moogles as characters, and this leads to a few more comical elements, but the overall feel of the game is very much dark and mysterious."

Joining Serah is Noel Kreiss, a hero who evokes memories of the PlayStation era of Nomura-designed male protagonists, such as Tidus from *Final Fantasy X*. "We did not particularly have Tidus or anyone in mind when designing Noel," says Kitase. "For these past few years we have been seeing a female lead character in the form of Lightning, and so it was decided that since it has been a while, we should go back to a more orthodox young male hero. In this regard, *XIII-2* may hark back to the older *Final Fantasy* titles for some people."

These changes illustrate *Final Fantasy*'s relationship with its fan base, with *XIII-2* restoring many of the traditional elements missing from its predecessor. As the franchise moves forward, it has to retain those qualities that make the series feel personal to gamers – and, if the past tells us anything, it's that no other series has the capacity to reinvent itself like this one does.

***Final Fantasy XIII-2* will be released in February 2012 on the PS3 and Xbox 360.**

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS

DINO CRISIS



You can just imagine *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami selling this game to the Capcom bosses. 'It's like *Resident Evil,* but with dinosaurs.' And if the board wasn't biting, he probably beefed up the pitch a bit. 'Resident Evil... with big-ass dinosaurs?'

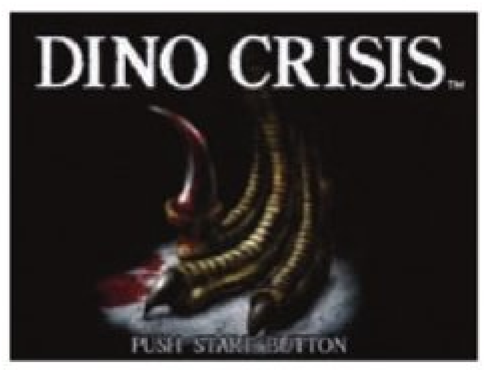
And that's exactly what *Dino Crisis* turned out to be. This is a PlayStation-era *Resident Evil* game featuring overgrown lizards rather than the living dead. It serves up the exact same mix of action, exploration, puzzle solving and brown-trouser moments; the same 'tank' control method (although you can walk with your gun drawn, unlike the games in the core *Resident Evil* series); a similar back-story involving a mad scientist conducting no-good-will-come-of-it experiments in a remote island facility, and a tactical team being sent in to find out what's going on; and finally, enough cheesy cut-scenes and dodgy dialogue to rival the original *Resident Evil* in the 'Jill sandwich' stakes.

It's so similar that some magazines suggested that the game was created purely to get around a licensing deal Capcom had struck with Sega. The rumour went that the *Resident Evil* series would become exclusive to the Dreamcast with the release of *Code: Veronica*, and that *Dino Crisis* was Capcom's way of providing PlayStation owners with another slice of survival horror. Of course that proved to be rubbish, as *Resident Evil 3* arrived on the PlayStation not long after, and *Code: Veronica* was later ported.

Despite being *Resident Evil* with dinosaurs, the game makes a key change to the visual style by dropping pre-rendered backgrounds in favour of a proper 3D graphics engine. This gives it a more fluid, cinematic feel, with the camera being able to track, pan and offer realistic point-of-view shots. The downside is that the visuals look crude compared to the *RE* titles, although the game does look better when played on a PS2 or PS3.

Dino Crisis garnered strong reviews on release, yet one criticism was shared by several reviewers: the game was nicely atmospheric, with plenty of tense moments, but no matter how large and toothy the dinosaurs were, they could never be as scary as a group of shambling, groaning zombies. It's funny, though, because playing it now, at a time when *every damn game* features zombies, the predatory dinos actually make for a refreshing change. It certainly doesn't feel as tired or as predictable as some of the other *RE* spin-offs.

Two direct sequels followed – the frantic action-orientated *Dino Crisis 2* in 2000 and the absolutely bonkers set-in-space *Dino Crisis 3* in 2003 – but it's the original game, with its survival horror trappings, that really retains its bite. And to add it to your collection these days will probably cost you less than a six-pack of Monster Munch.



INFO

- **SYSTEM:** PLAYSTATION
- **RELEASED:** 1999
- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC, DREAMCAST





DINO DOO

Problems and perils you'll face on Ibis Island



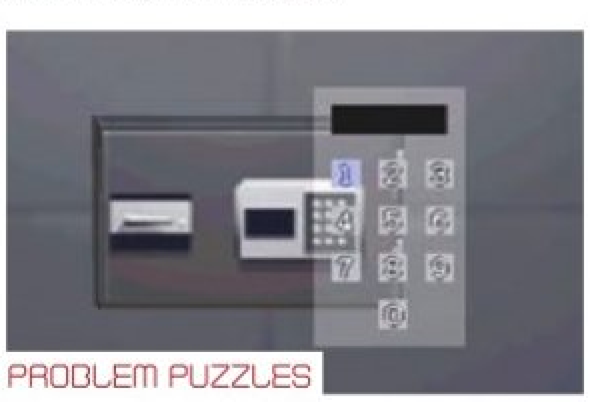
SUPPLY SHORTAGE

Just like the original *RE*, ammo and health are pretty scarce – and you'll need all you can get.



WHEELS O' GAME

The research facility is a sprawling complex set over several levels. It can be quite disorientating at times.



PROBLEM PUZZLES

The puzzles typically involve locked doors and finding ways to open them. Nothing too tricky, but check for clues.



RAPTOR ATTACK

The most common enemy you'll encounter in the game. These guys are quick and deliver a nasty bite.



FLYING TERROR

In outdoor areas you'll want to keep moving, as Pteranodons swoop above. You may get lifted into the air.



TYRANNOSAURUS!

If the screen shakes then you know that a T-Rex is nearby. One bite is deadly, so use powerful weapons.

» [PSone] The game certainly isn't a PG *Jurassic Park* affair. Bodies get chomped and ripped apart, spilling blood all over the place.





FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

DOMARK

Which company took a well-known quiz-based board game and turned it into a hit videogame? For Dominic Wheatley and Mark Strachan the answer is rather easy. David Crookes looks back at Domark, one of the UK's most successful publishers

Here's a question. Which game prompted two marketing people with no videogaming experience to enter an industry they knew nothing about with a hunch that they could make a lot of money? The answer is *The Heroes Of Karn* on the Commodore 64.

And as unlikely as that may appear, it was enough for Dominic Wheatley and Mark Strachan to quit their jobs and form Domark in 1984, a company whose success would not only delight a host of 8- and 16-bit gamers but also help to give birth to one of the most prominent videogame characters of all time.

It all started when Dominic watched his brother play *The Heroes Of Karn* in December 1983. "I'd gone home at Christmas and I saw that my brother had bought a Commodore 64," he says. "I looked at this machine and I thought, 'Oh, that looks absolutely amazing. I can't believe he's playing an adventure game or whatever it is.' At that moment I was really impressed. As far as I was concerned, computers had been sitting on the desks of accountants and finance directors and not ordinary people. Suddenly I realised that ordinary people were taking these things on and I just knew this was going to be huge."

In the new year, Dominic went back to work as a junior account executive at a small advertising agency in London called Garden. He told his colleague, Mark Strachan, about his discovery, and he floated the idea of leaving the agency and setting up a publishing company to market third-party games. Mark's head was turned when he took a stroll down the high street. "There were 'we have sold out of Spectrums' stickers on retailers' windows. We just felt that people would want games," he said. It was an epiphany for the pair, who took parts of their names to form the brand name, Domark. Perhaps that is why it was so fitting that they should name their first game *Eureka!*.

Dominic had the idea of an adventure game in which players ran around, finding clues, as part of a treasure hunt. And, being marketing people, they wanted to find a way of getting people to play the game. They decided to create a competition: upon completion of the game, a secret telephone number would be revealed, and the first person to call would win £25,000.

The pair began raising some cash to get both the game and the competition off the ground. "We went off with our plan and our ideas to generate investment," says Dominic. "That was, of course, difficult in 1984, but we went around friends and family, parents and various people we bumped into, and we eventually mustered up £160,000, which was more than enough to do the project. We found some programmers in Hungary called Andromedia and we started our marketing plans. We launched it to great fanfare, lots of PR and lots of press and stuff like that, and it did all right. It didn't knock one out of the park, but it did sufficiently well for us to make a little bit of money and be still in business."

The game was written by Ian Livingstone and the marketing was handled by a

INSTANT EXPERT

Founders Dominic Wheatley and Mark Strachan took parts of their names to form the brand Domark.

Dominic is the grandson of author Dennis Wheatley, and Mark had good connections with Whitbread Brewery.

Dominic graduated from Sandhurst in 1978 and served a commission in the Irish Guards.

He met Mark when working at an advertising agency in London.

The pair saw the potential of computer games after seeing C64 game *The Heroes Of Karn*.

They approached their friend, author and Games Workshop founder Ian Livingstone, to write a game. *Eureka!* was the result.

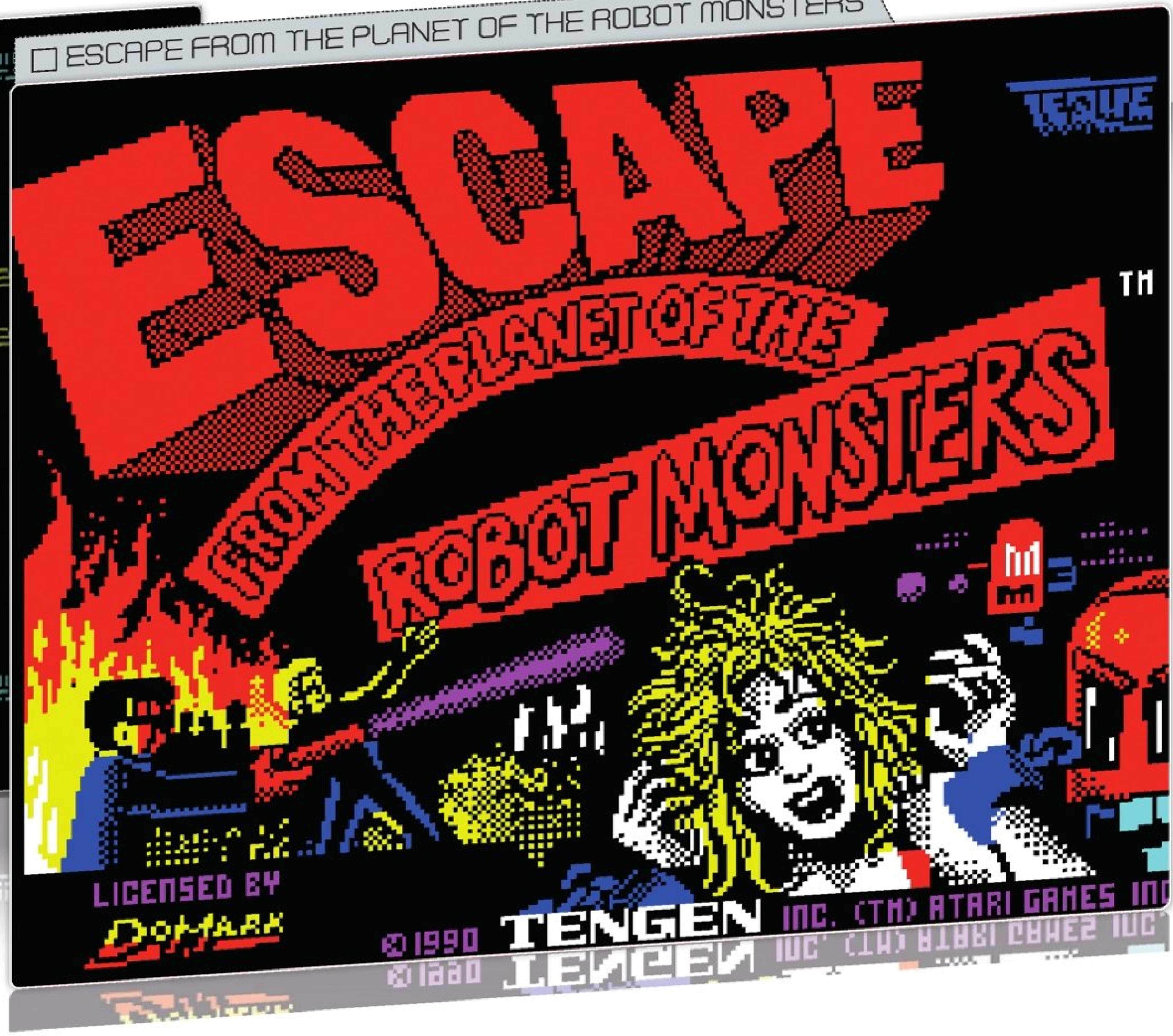
Thousands of pounds was spent on marketing – including £25,000 for the first person to finish it.

Domark eventually became Eidos, which owned Core Design, developing *Tomb Raider*.

Ian Livingstone remains at Eidos as life president.



ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS



> **"There were 'sold out' stickers on shop windows. We felt that people would want games"**

MARK STRACHAN ON HIS MOTIVATION FOR FORMING DOMARK



company they set up called Concept Marketing. Ian, who had founded Games Workshop and had written the *Fighting Fantasy* books, was so impressed by Dominic and Mark that he became one of Domark's investors.

"Dominic and Mark were aware of the success of Games Workshop and *Fighting Fantasy*," recalls Ian. "It was 1984 and *Deathtrap Dungeon* was number one in the children's charts. It was getting a lot of publicity, so we had a meeting and they asked me to design their game. At the time armchair mystery puzzles with prizes were all the rage, not more so than the search for the golden hare from *Masquerade*, the infamous Kit Williams book. Dominic and Mark wanted to do the same with a computer game."

Although Ian believed in the company and was happy to buy into it, Domark was unsure what to do next. "The other side of Christmas was tricky," says Dominic. "We wondered what the hell else we were going to do." It was then that the founding pair began to explore licences.

"We really started to expand Domark when we hit on the idea of taking on licences," says Mark. "The time we had with *Eureka!* was some ride, and it had done okay. We were new kids on the block and I remember Lee Ginty of Microdealer did an exclusive with us at the PCW Show. We felt we had really arrived. I was only 24 at the time, and it was just so exciting."

Dominic and Mark had a contact within the Ian Fleming estate, and so they approached him with an idea of producing a *James Bond* game. It was agreed that they would be allowed to secure the rights, and soon *A View To A Kill* had been commissioned. Yet things didn't go smoothly. Dominic said they allowed the programmers to dictate the direction of the game and took what they said at face value. The planned game became unfeasible, and it shipped very late. But it was still the first *James Bond* videogame ever made, and Dominic contends that it was "actually quite successful". "We sort of lurched in and out of success in the first couple of years," he said. "Building the company wasn't easy."

Making friends, however, was. "We didn't have any rivals," says Mark. "We were great friends with competitors. No one had the *Bond* licence other than us, so we were friends with everyone."

But it wasn't the *Bond* licence that created Domark's fortune; that fell to *Trivial Pursuit*. "We had a lucky break," says Dominic. "There was a company called Leisure Genius, which had done extremely well with *Scrabble* and board games that had been converted into computer games. *Trivial Pursuit* had become a really hot board game a couple of Christmases before. It was an extremely well-known and big, big property, and I went to see these guys and I got the rights to it."

BY THE NUMBERS

24 The ages of Mark Strachan and Dominic Wheatley when they set up Domark

£25,000 The amount offered to the first person to finish *Eureka!* and let Domark know

15,000 The number of tapes that *Eureka!* sold

83 Percentage scored by Domark's *Trivial Pursuit* game in *Zzap!64*

4 Number of divisions in *Championship Manager*

£160,000 Cash raised from family and friends to start Domark

23 The number of investors in the company

£10,000 The amount invested by Ian Livingstone

£280,000 The royalty cheque written for Atari following the success of the *Star Wars* trilogy

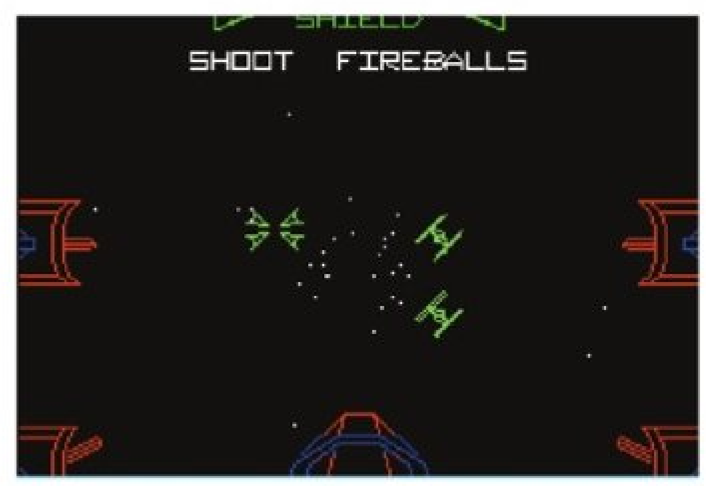
13 Menzies refused to sell *Friday The 13th* because the cover had a blood-covered hockey mask with a knife piercing the eye hole

£11,000,000 The value of the games that Domark was selling annually by 1994

FROM THE ARCHIVES







» [Spectrum] *Star Wars* was a big deal for Domark, and was followed by two sequels.

TIMELINE

1984 DOMARK FOUNDED BY DOMINIC WHEATLEY AND MARK STRACHAN

1984 IAN LIVINGSTONE IS ASKED TO WRITE *EUREKA!*

1985 THE RIGHTS TO A *JAMES BOND* GAME ARE ACQUIRED AND A *VIEW TO A KILL* IS RELEASED

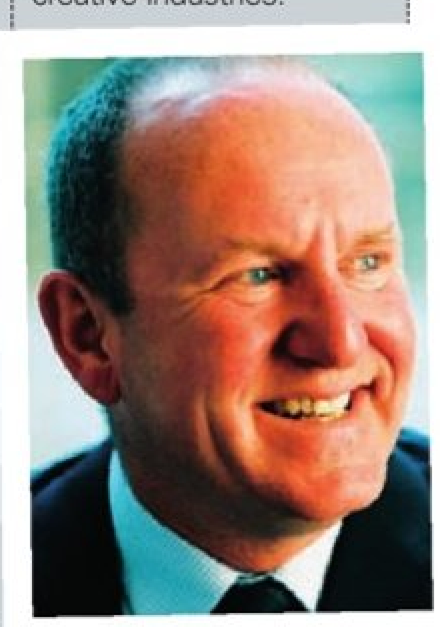
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?





Dominic Wheatley
After a short while without a project of his own, Dominic hooked up with an old friend from Domark and pursued an idea for producing interactive toys, which included *Thomas The Tank Engine* and *Bob The Builder* and was taken on by Bandai. Later he came across Alex Halliday and Steve Hardman in Shoreditch, London, who were producing social networking software. The company is now known as SocialGO, and Dominic is its executive chairman.

Mark Strachan
Four years after leaving Domark in 1995, Mark set up Gameplay PLC, which rented and sold games on the internet. He sold it in 2002 when he became CEO of the Entertainment Software Charity, raising money for the education of disadvantaged UK children. Three years later, he became the non-executive chairman of In2Games Ltd, and in 2006 he funded Piste Activities, which operated in the Alps. "After Domark, I went on to be chairman of ELSPA and had the great privilege of climbing Kilimanjaro three times for charity with my great friend Andy Payne," he says.



Ian Livingstone
Ian stayed with Domark/Eidos. In 2005, Eidos was taken over by SCi, but Ian remained as the only board member to do so. He became the company's product acquisition director. As well as overseeing the *Tomb Raider* period, he contributed to *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* in 2007 and, in 2009, when Square Enix bought Eidos Interactive, Ian became the company's 'life president'. He does a lot of work within the gaming industry, and in 2010 he was asked to act as the UK's skills champion by Ed Vaizey, the minister for culture, communications and creative industries.

Unknown to Dominic, the guys at Leisure Genius were sceptical that the game would actually work on a computer, and so they were more than happy to allow Domark to give it a go. "When I met the guys later, they were very rueful that they'd never thought of producing a *Trivial Pursuit* game, and they admitted they couldn't see how it could be done successfully on a computer," he recalls. "But we had all sorts of ideas about how you could see a map with no names and had to say what a certain country was, or you could hear some music and try to name the song – that sort of thing. You pressed a button, and if you got it right you moved on."

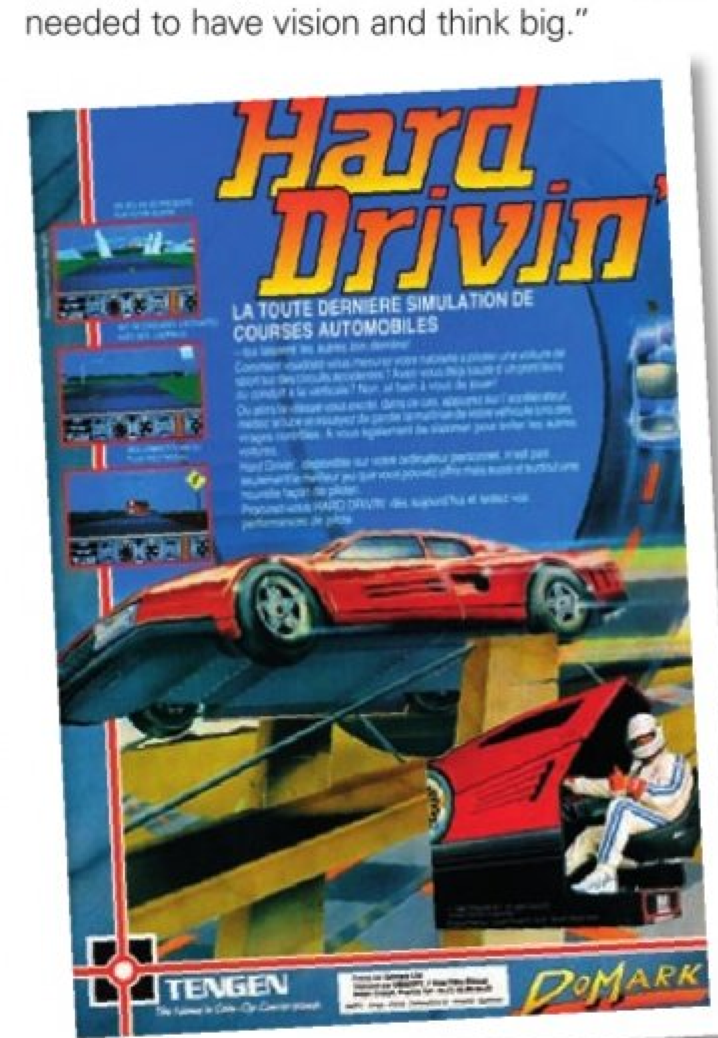
The game was built by Oxford Digital Enterprises, but Dominic and Mark became heavily involved. "We spent a lot of time on it ourselves," remembers Dominic. "It was one of the few times I've spent actually helping to develop a game, and it did extremely well; we sold about 2 million units. It was what you could call our *Tubular Bells* moment – you know, the thing that got Branson going. It was exactly the same thing. It got us going. We got a ton of money and lots of work. We moved to smart offices and got new people, and we just kicked off."

The licences continued to roll out and Domark turned its attention to coin-ops. There was a flirtation with an in-house dev team – "Mainly we used outside teams, but we did set up our own called The Kremlin, which had mixed success," says Mark – but publishing was the focus.

It was noted that US Gold and Ocean were proving to be very successful in turning arcade machine titles into successful home computer games. Dominic flew to Las Vegas in 1987 for his very first CES appearance, and he remembers a packed hall with lots of established American companies, many of which knew each other. Dominic, however, was on his own and Domark was still a small business, despite its successes.

"I remember sitting very sadly in my little room at Caesars Palace, wondering who on earth I was going to meet," he says. "I was wandering around the show, looking fairly gormless, and then I bumped into this guy called Manlio Allegra. He was a sort of agent representing people like Konami, which was doing coin-ops, and, of course, Atari and many other big coin-op manufacturers. He was the guy who was doing the deals between the big guys, Ocean and US Gold. And because those guys were already much bigger than us because they'd started a bit earlier than us, they were paying quite big money for the new, big, hot coin-op properties, and we couldn't compete."

So Dominic invited Allegra to his hotel room for a meeting. "I remember sitting in my little room with Manlio, having a meeting, and he was trying to bully me into taking on all of these games he had, and I was saying, 'No, no, no, it's too much money. I can't possibly…' He was saying we needed to get in the game, and I was telling him we couldn't afford it and that we only had £25,000 to spend, at which point he looked at me with despair, thinking how penny pinching I was and telling me that we needed to have vision and think big."



- **1986** – A MIXED YEAR. *FRIDAY THE 13TH* WAS TERRIBLE BUT A DEAL WITH LEISURE GENIUS LED TO *TRIVIAL PURSUIT*, WHICH CHANGED DOMARK'S FORTUNES
- **1987** – MORE *JAMES BOND*. MORE *TRIVIAL PURSUIT*. BUT DOMARK ALSO SECURED THE RIGHTS FOR ATARI'S *STAR WARS* TRILOGY AT CES IN LAS VEGAS
- **1988** – A BUMPER YEAR. DOMARK HAD THE RIGHTS TO CONVERT ATARI GAMES AND *LIVE AND LET DIE* WAS RELEASED, AS WAS *SPITTING IMAGE*, *TOTAL ECLIPSE* AND *TOOBIN'*
- **1989** – BOND. JAMES BOND. *007: LICENCE TO KILL* THAT WAS JOINED BY *HARD DRIVIN'*, *KLAX* AND *APB*, AMONG OTHERS. DOMARK WAS GETTING INTO ITS STRIDE
- **1990** – A DEAL WITH BRØDERBUND ALLOWED DOMARK TO PUBLISH *PRINCE OF PERSIA*. IT CONTINUED TO PUBLISH ATARI GAMES (*BADLANDS*, *CYBERBALL*, *KLAX*). OH, AND *THE SPY WHO LOVED ME* WAS RELEASED
- **1990** – THE COMPANY NAME CHANGED TO DOMARK SOFTWARE LTD. AN IN-HOUSE DEVELOPMENT TEAM WAS FORMED CALLED THE KREMLIN
- **1991** – DOMARK PUBLISHED FLIGHT GAMES BY SIMIS. THIS YEAR INCLUDED *MIG-29 FULCRUM*
- **1992** – A MEETING WITH TWO LADS FROM NEWCASTLE LED TO THE PUBLISHING OF THE MASSIVE *CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER*
- **1993** – DOMARK SOFTWARE INC WAS ESTABLISHED IN CALIFORNIA
- **1994** – FINANCIAL TROUBLE MEANT DOMARK HAD TO VISIT THE BANK, WHICH WAS CALLING IN A £2 MILLION DEBT. THE FIRM PERSUADED THE BANK TO REMAIN FAITHFUL
- **1995** – A REVERSE TAKEOVER MEANT EIDOS ACQUIRED DOMARK, SIMIS AND BIG RED GAMES TO FORM THE EIDOS INTERACTIVE GROUP. IT LATER ACQUIRED US GOLD, CREATOR OF CORE DESIGN, WHICH MADE *TOMB RAIDER*

Allegra began to look down his list and started to reel off names that he said were at the bottom of the barrel. He mentioned *Star Wars*. "I went, 'What, what, what?'" laughs Dominic. "I'm like, 'Hold on, I've played that game. It's an absolutely brilliant game. I love it. It was one of the great coin-op games. I offered him £25,000 for the trilogy, he went off to Atari and it was all okayed. We got the rights to *Star Wars*."

Another contact, on hearing that Domark had acquired the *Star Wars* rights, phoned Dominic to tell him that there was a German programmer who had already converted the game to the Amiga. The developer had been touting the game around, and he was put in touch with Dominic. "We took him out of Germany, brought him over, put him up, and he just basically programmed the Amiga, the ST, all the conversions, and he was brilliant. I'd rarely come across as good a programmer as this guy. And these games were a huge success. They went straight to the top of the charts. We sold bucketloads."

The first royalty cheque Domark sent to Atari two months later was for £280,000. Atari immediately set up a meeting. Its people were impressed by the quality of the games and the marketing behind them. Telling Dominic that they were fed up of working with lots of different companies, they struck a deal. Atari asked Domark to be its sole conversion company. "We were like, 'Cool'," says Dominic, laughing.

It was a major deal for Domark. Although Atari was developing conversions of its coin-ops under its own Tengen brand, Domark had scooped up all of the home computer rights. Home computers were still very big in Europe but not quite so popular in America, where the consoles were beginning to take hold.

Domark realised this and so set about trying to gain a foothold in consoles too. Dominic's old friend Mick Alexander was running Sega, so he went along to see him, securing a Sega licence in the process. "We started making great Sega games, like *F1*, which was a huge hit, and stuff like that," says Dominic. "Of course, Atari then distributed our console games for us in the US. We were building up a huge, long relationship with Atari, and it was at a time of growth and fun. We made lots of money and had lots of lovely expenses and hotels and so on. It was absolutely fantastic."

During this spell, Domark published a great many games including *APB*, *Dragon Spirit*, *Vindicators*, *Hard Drivin'* and *Toobin'*. Its office in Putney, south London, was overrun with arcade machines from Tengen, mixed in with the 20 staff that worked there. Domark was not one to rest on its laurels, though, and in 1992 it was realised that it needed an office in America. Dominic moved with his wife and two children to America, where he could meet lots more people and manage



"I called a modelling agency and they got some really rough-looking actor"

DOMINIC WHEATLEY ON THE CHOICE FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER COVER

the company's relationship with Atari on its own doorstep. Based in Silicon Valley, Dominic got down to work. One of the scoops was a distribution deal with Spectrum Holobyte, which was notable for its flight simulators.

One of the big successes for Domark came soon after. Two lads – Paul and ▶



IAN LIVINGSTONE'S MEMORIES



"I invested in Domark after meeting Dominic and Mark in 1984, as I believed *Eureka!* would be successful. After selling my remaining interest in Games Workshop in 1991, I invested more in Domark with a seat on their board and became deputy chairman in 1992. In October 1995, we met the directors of Eidos Technologies and, long story short, we merged four companies into what became Eidos Interactive, which we floated on the London Stock Exchange. I became chairman of the new group. We took control and launched *Tomb Raider* in November 1996. It was an incredible success, far beyond anything we'd hoped for. They were very exciting times!"



» [PC] With heaps of stats and a passionate developer, *Championship Manager* went down a storm.



» Domark was merged with Eidos in a reverse takeover. *Tomb Raider* became a phenomenon.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

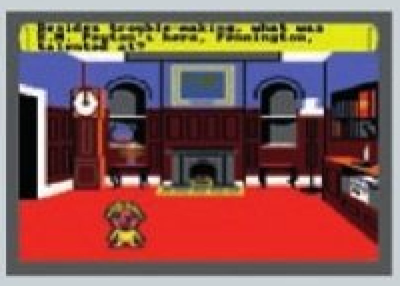


» [CPC] *APB* had all the thrills of the arcade, but the graphics didn't match the ambition.

SIX OF THE BEST



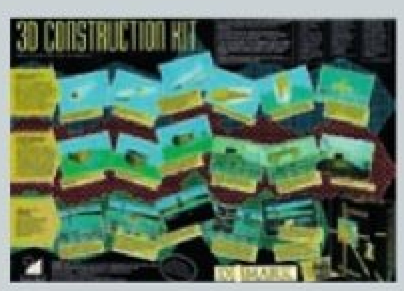
Championship Manager [1992]
Written by Everton-mad brothers Paul and Oliver Collyer, this management sim drew heavily on their knowledge and quickly took its place as the finest game in its genre. Everton later used the brothers' *Football Manager* to help scout for new players.



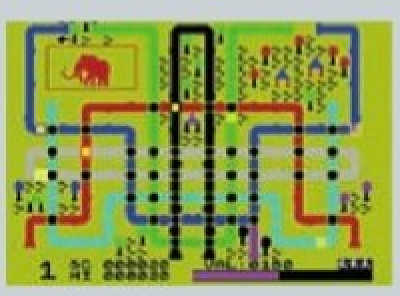
Trivial Pursuit [1986]
Although Leisure Genius couldn't see how a computer version of its popular board game could make a videogame, Domark did. Six players were able to get involved with the fun that turned Domark into a giant publisher almost overnight.



Hard Drivin' [1989]
Published as part of a deal struck with Atari, *Hard Drivin'* was a 3D treat, putting players behind the wheel to perform all manner of stunts, the hardest part of which was staying on the track. It was a bold conversion that deserved attention.



3D Construction Kit [1991]
Incentive Software produced the Amiga and Spectrum versions but Domark handled the rest. The result was an acclaimed endeavour that scored highly for its ability to let people produce their own 3D worlds. It was simple and it was expensive, but it was effective.

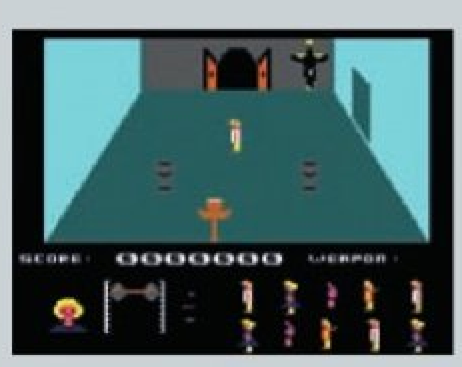


Eureka! [1984]
Written by Ian Livingstone, *Eureka!* was Domark's first release. It suited Ian's literary talent given that it was a text adventure, accompanied by arcade game versions. Best of all, the first person to finish it won a £25,000 cash prize.



Prince Of Persia [1990]
A deal with Brøderbund meant Domark was able to publish one of the best platformers ever. It was ported to every platform under the desert sun and was yet another successful deal by a company that was firmly established as a major player.

TWO TO AVOID



Friday The 13th [1986]
This was Domark's videogame nasty, not in the sense that it was filled with gore but because it was such a dreadful game that it was scary it ever got a release. It drew inspiration from the film and was pretty much a cash-in, and a terrible, lazy one at that. Still, Domark could never have been accused of not trying, and so it was that the game earned itself a *Crash* cover, which gathered complaints, and its PR people went into overdrive, with disclaimers warning nervous gamers to beware of playing the game, some blood capsules given away, and a competition chucked in for good measure.



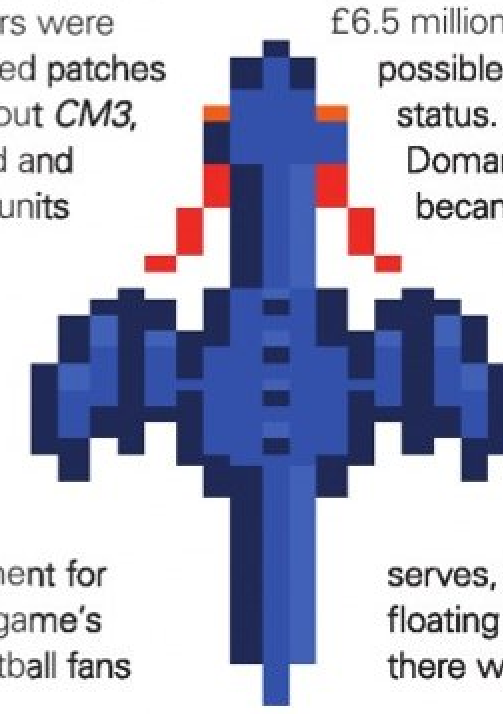
A View To A Kill [1985]
Domark secured the licence for *James Bond* games, a real early coup that helped it to establish itself as one of the premier publishers. *A View To A Kill* was the first game to be based on the famous British spy character, and it revolved around three action sequences, its release coinciding with the cinema opening, befitting a company that had much marketing know-how. The crude graphics could be forgiven, but the game failed to capture the excitement of *Bond*, and it was also marred by the fact that you couldn't be killed. It reviewed rather well at the time but it's terribly dated today.

Oliver Collyer – had produced a football management game, which they pitched to Domark. Dominic wasn't interested until one of his staff said they had been playing the game and couldn't stop. Domark felt there were too many management games and believed it didn't have the expertise to pull it off in a crowded market, but some members of staff were so enthusiastic that the company decided to make the Collyers an offer of £5,000. They snapped it up.

"The idea was brought to me as I sat in my chair in Lacy Road in Putney," says Mark. "I went to see the brothers in a pub in Brighton to chat, and that was the start of it. It was the beginning of a great relationship that benefited everyone."

And benefit everyone it certainly did. "I called a modelling agency and they got some really rough-looking actor, took a photograph and put it on the front of the box, and we called it *Championship Manager*," said Dominic. "We quickly sold the first few thousand units and then we started getting reorders, and more reorders, and more. Suddenly it's doing 20, 50,000 units. I'm like, 'Hey, this is bloody good.' And, sure enough, the boys come down after Christmas and we gave them a cheque for £75,000 and they fall off their chairs. I seem to recall a couple of months later they came back down again driving brand new GTIs. And that was it. We said: 'Listen, you're going to do *Championship Manager 2*, right?' And we commissioned them right there on the spot."

The sequel sold bucketloads, but it contained bugs, and gamers were disappointed. Domark issued patches but it didn't help, so it put out *CM3*, which was much improved and sold a couple of thousand units in the first weekend. The franchise went on and on and became the biggest football management game, making the developers millions of pounds in the process.



"It was a wake-up moment for me," says Dominic. "The game's tagline was: 'Made for football fans by football fans'. And it was true. These boys were absolutely obsessed. You'd ask them about their mother and they'd say something like, 'Mother's great because Chelsea won on Saturday.' They couldn't not talk about football, and they were so passionate. I've found out in life that people who are passionate about their business or their subject tend to be successful, and they just need business people around them to take care of the dirty bits – you know, publishing. If you back them then you'll be successful and bask in their reflected glory."

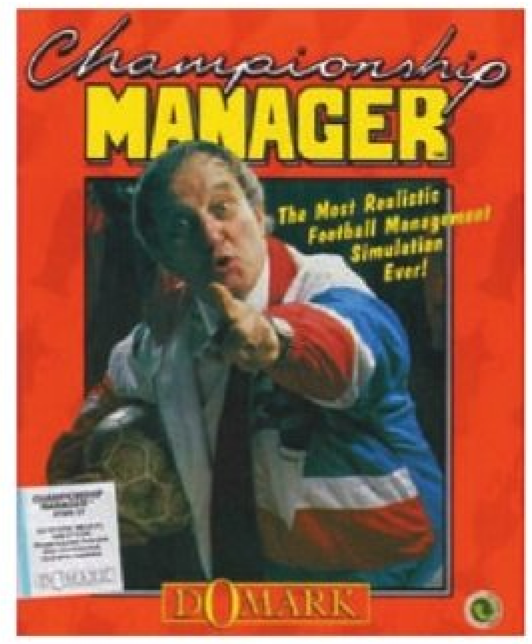
Such enthusiasm was not always apparent. He confesses that his *James Bond* games were under par because the teams were not quite right. In hindsight, he says, they would have found *James Bond* fanatics to develop it. "That wasn't the case for, say, *Star Wars* on the Amiga," he adds. "We had someone passionate on that."

Soon after, Domark became a public company. Dominic and Mark met a man named Charles Cornwall, who had founded a firm called Eidos. It was a small company employing just three people, creating video compression technology particularly for the Acorn Archimedes, but it had no sales. It was, however, floated on the London Stock Exchange, and it had raised £1 million. Cornwall was looking for something better to attach his company to and, during the course of a conversation with the Domark pair, an agreement was struck to corporately reverse Domark into it. This enabled the publisher to grab some cash and go on to raise another £6.5 million through city investors, made possible by its new listed company status. As part of this deal, however, Domark had to change its name. It became known as Eidos.

"The market was hot in 1995 so we got all our money and we got it very easily," says Dominic. "In fact, it was well oversubscribed, and the share price moved from around £3.80, if memory serves, and by the evening it was floating at just under £6 per share, so there was a lot of excitement and lots

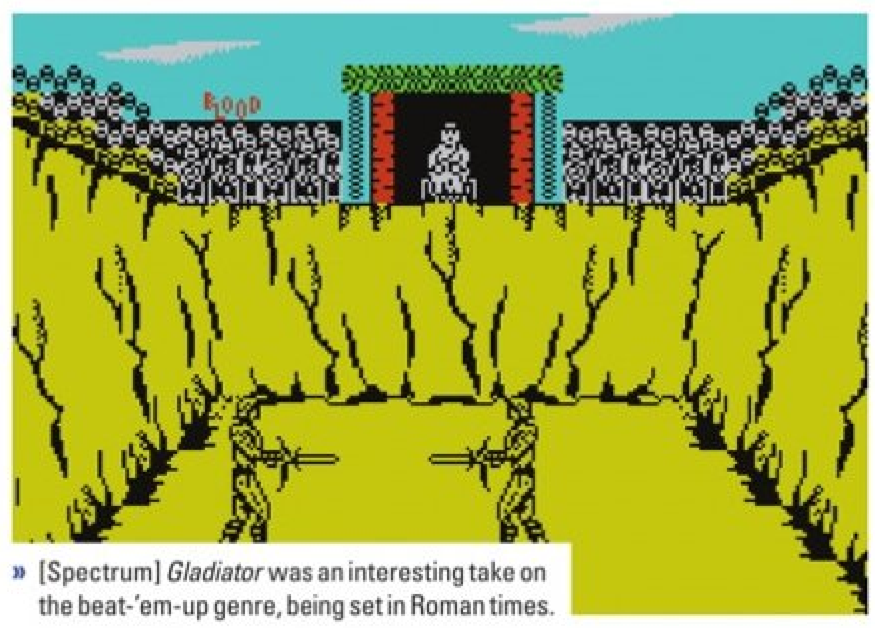


» [CPC] *Pictionary* was yet another board game published by Domark, alongside *Trivial Pursuit*.








» [Spectrum] *Gladiator* was an interesting take on the beat-'em-up genre, being set in Roman times.

of rock and roll. We had all this money to go and do things, and I toddled off back to California. I then got a call from Charles, asking what I knew about US Gold."

US Gold was a company founded by Geoff Brown. Based in Birmingham, it had built a solid reputation, mainly for its coin-op ports. It had floated on the stock exchange a year earlier, but in 1996 Eidos spied an opportunity and acquired CentreGold, which included both US Gold and CentreSoft. The latter, which was the distribution arm of the company, was sold back in an MBO. And while Eidos also snapped up Simis and Big Red Software, it was the move for US Gold that would lead to the opening of a brand new, lucrative chapter for Domark in its new form.

"Along with US Gold came the development studio Core Design," explains Dominic. "It was run by Jeremy Heath-Smith, and I knew him very well. Luckily for us, they were working on a game called *Tomb Raider*, which at the time was just one of the many products on a list of things they were doing. I was a bit dubious about *Tomb Raider* because it sounded very much like *Indiana Jones* and that worried me, but when I later did a presentation of the game at E3, the reception was amazing. I knew then that we were on to something huge."

With Sony and Sega vying for the rights, Eidos was on a roll, and it quickly gained a reputation for being a party company. It employed lots of young, good-looking American men and women, and they were having a ball. "The parties were amazing," says Dominic. "We always had a party at E3 and previous CESs, and it was great fun. One night we had taken over a nightclub housing 1,000 people. It was packed to the rafters. There was a big country and western band, and I was like a king. Everybody was coming up to me going, 'Oh boy, *Tomb Raider* is going to be huge.' And, sure enough, it was, and the rest is history… 40 million copies later."

Following this major success, Dominic's career was at a personal crossroads. Although he was having a lot of fun and he had been in California for five years, his children had been brought up as entirely American and were now six and seven years old. His wife wanted them to be brought up and educated in Britain. "I agreed we'd go back to the UK," says Dominic. "I loved California and my team out there so much, so it was hard. A lot of stuff had changed in the UK office too because Charles was running it, and a lot of people that I hadn't hired – you know, lawyers and people – and I didn't really know were there. Eidos also had a lot of politics at board level and that kind of thing because it was growing so fast. The share price was zooming and I was thinking to myself, 'Right, I want to get back, but I'm not sure I would necessarily want to go on working for the company in the UK.' I decided then that it was mission accomplished for me. People who had put £5,000 or £10,000 into Domark in 1984 came out with [as much as] £15 million."

Dominic announced to Ian – who had himself invested £10,000 – that he was going, following Mark, who left in 1995 and founded a company called Gameplay four years later. "My favourite games in all that time were *Split Personalities* on the C64 and *Star Wars* on the Amiga," Mark says. Mike McGarvey became the CEO of Eidos Interactive.

"That was the end of my dealings with the company," says Dominic. "I just started investing in different things like property. I have a house in France and a restaurant over there somewhere, and I have a few non-executive directorships of mobile phone companies. I eventually wanted my own gig and today I run a company called SocialGO. One thing's for sure, though: I had a ball helping run Domark."

"I was sitting in my room at Caesars Palace, wondering who I was going to meet"

DOMINIC WHEATLEY'S FIRST CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW

HOW DOMARK NEARLY WENT BUST

Marko's Magic Football nearly killed Domark. After much money had been spent on the game, the lead programmer left and the Oliver twins were asked to finish it. They reconstructed the game, but all of this meant it was released late.

Worse, however, the UK sales team ordered 200,000 cartridges, which had to be paid for up front, costing £2 million.

"Sega and Nintendo demanded the payment of cartridges up front, so the greater success of a game, the greater cash you needed," recalls Mark. "A hit of 1 million cartridges would cost around £10m, and very few UK companies had that liquidity. It wasn't good."

"I got a phone call from my finance director while I was lying in bed in California at 7am," says Dominic. "I climbed out of bed, got myself a ticket, and was on the next plane back to London and straight to the bank."

One of the bank managers wanted to fold the company. "I said, 'Look, there's the keys. If you want it, you take it. You're going to get nothing back. You're going to get absolutely fucking nothing.' I then added, 'Or give me another £300,000 for cash flow on top of what we've taken and I'll make changes on the management.'"

He showed the recovery manager their cash flow forecast and product schedules. The recovery manager agreed. Shortly after, Domark was merged with Eidos and the company's fortunes were secured.



» [CPC] *3D Construction Kit* allowed people to produce their own three-dimensional artwork and move around it.



» [Spectrum] A wonderful variation on an otherwise familiar theme, *Badlands* was a belter of a game.

THE CLASSIC GAME



We're guessing there aren't many of you that haven't seen the classic 1972 thriller *Deliverance*? If not, then maybe you've seen the far tamer *The River Wild*? The latter saw a well-to-do family terrorised by violent criminals while on a white water river excursion; there was swearing and a knife and John C Reilly was involved. In the former, it was a river-based hunting trip spoiled by some backwater hillbillies – and something else was involved, which we won't mention. Well, by comparison, Atari's memorable *Toobin'* made both of those feel like a relaxing few days for all concerned… well, maybe not for actor Ned Beaty.

Letters
Hidden throughout the river courses are the letters that make up the word 'Toobin', and collecting them all awarded you a special prize.

Cans
Bobbing around in the water are discarded cans. These can be picked up and used as projectile weapons to immobilise dangers and sink nasty twigs.

Tubers
Toobin' is a fun two-player game, and stars two inner tube-riding bodacious dudes, Bif and Jet. They have the exact same attributes, and bad hair.



Treasure
Treasure chests bob in the water and can be fished out during the race to earn some extra points.

Gates
2,000

Toobin's perilous courses are littered with point gates. Hitting them rather than traversing tidily through causes their point value to drop.

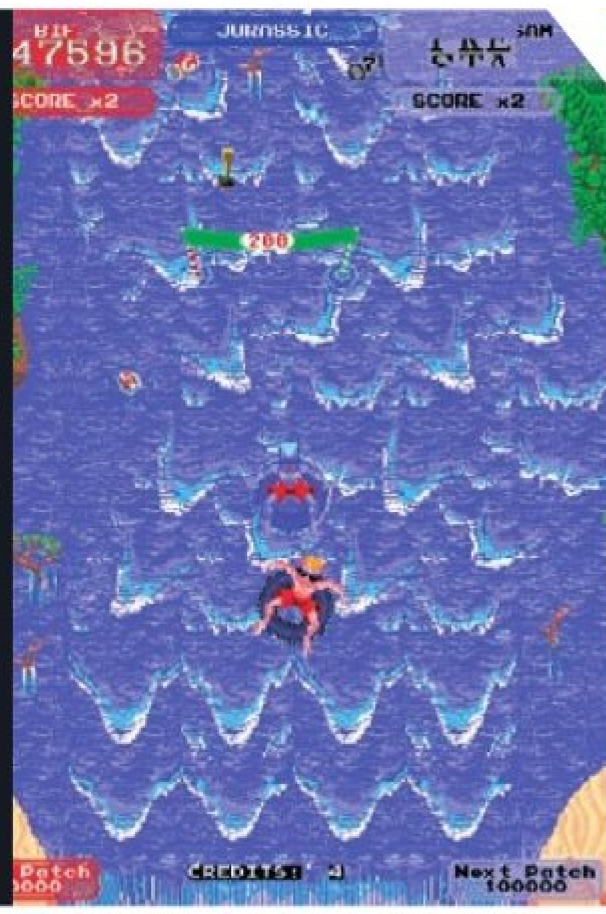
Dangers
The waters are teeming with dangers to avoid: from twigs and falling tree branches, to tornadoes and dawdling, hating gators.

Patches
Seals are hard to come by, but as soon as you see one, grab it. They'll patch up a hole in a burst ring, giving you an extra life.

Beach Ball
Beach balls offer Bif and Jet a handy speed boost; it also allows them to throw cans faster, too.



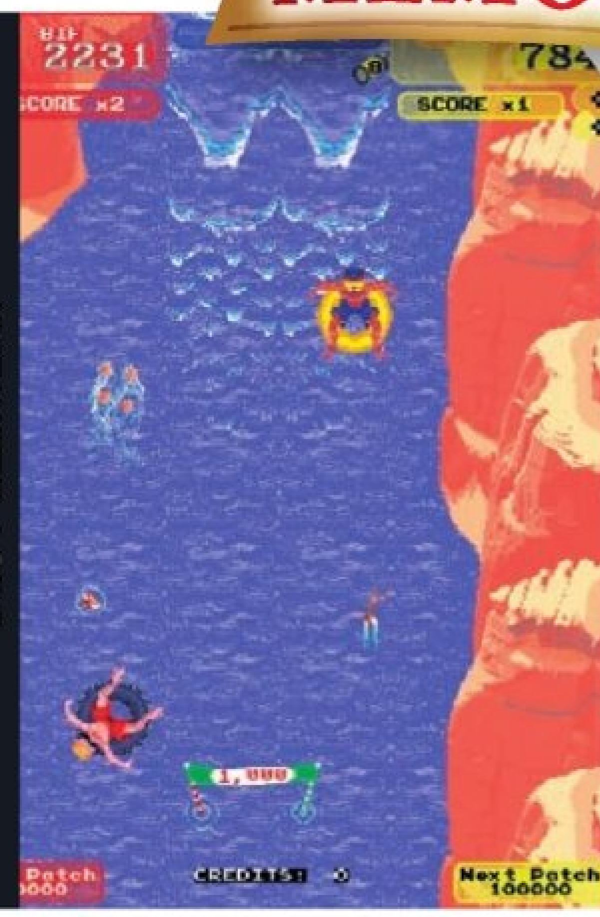
WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



The River Wild

Starting as a restrained kayak-themed racer, with tricks and an authentic paddle control system, this approach was deemed too much hard work (on the player's part) by its creators. *Toobin'* was consequently born: a lively game dripping with fun, silliness and colour. It invited players to help a kid riding an inner tube reach various beach parties (complete with topless girl) taking place at the end of some pretty perilous and bizarre stretches of water. From avoiding laser-spitting sphinxes in the Nile, to big-nosed aliens in the canals of Mars, *Toobin'* was full of charm and character, and great to play with a mate. It garnered no shortage of attention from arcade goers.

BEST ELEMENT



Two tube dudes

Without doubt one of the best aspects of *Toobin'* was its fantastic two-player mode. In fact, the game is always played by two tubers, as in a single-player game the second player is represented by a spectral-looking chap called Flotsam. When racing to the beach party with a mate, *Toobin'* really comes alive, as you fight to get through the gates first and nudge each other into obstacles. It provides a really entertaining laugh, and will likely recall to mind competitive multiplayer moments, such as balloon popping in *Mario Kart*, or the fight to win the heart of Marian at the finale of *Double Dragon*.

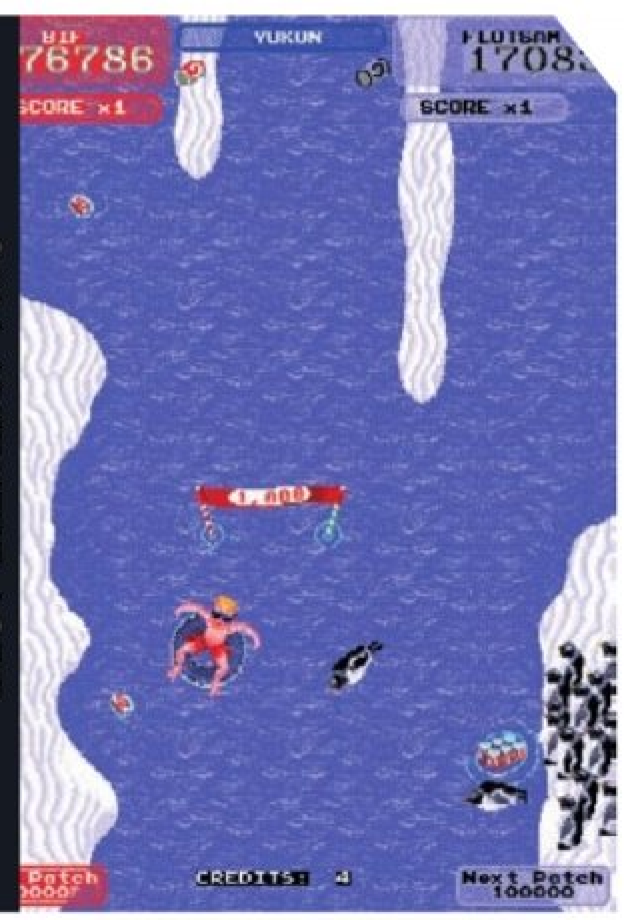
BEST RIVER



Wizards & waterfalls

Toobin' featured an impressive number of themed stages, and each featured a nice array of unique and relevant inhabitants. From gun-toting bandits in Rio Grande, to a Jurassic stage that featured angry caveman and a dippy diplodocus – that swats tubers with its tail – picking a favourite will come down purely to which tickles you the most. Purely down to its absurdity, our favourite stage is the Black Forest, which sees Bif and Jet paddling frantically to avoid fire-breathing dragons, possessed trees and wicked wizards. It even features a nice sightseeing attraction courtesy of this rather grand medieval castle.

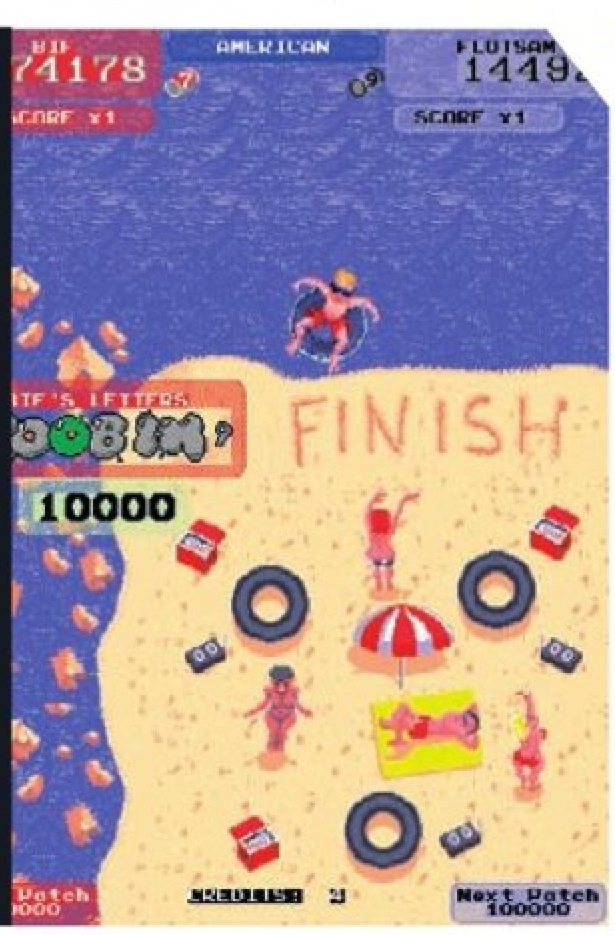
BEST ELEMENT TWO



Controls like a rubber ring should

Though the scrapped kayak vision for *Toobin'* was to feature an innovative control system designed to mimic paddling, the finished article still featured a thoughtful control system. Located on the coin-op's dash sat five action buttons positioned in a circle to represent the shape of a rubber ring. Rather than steer the ring using a joystick, players instead frantically tapped the fire buttons which would enable Biff and Jet to paddle backwards or forwards using their left or right hand independently – naturally, to travel straight both hands had to working simultaneously. It takes a bit of getting used to but, once mastered, it works a treat.

MAGIC MOMENT



T in the water park

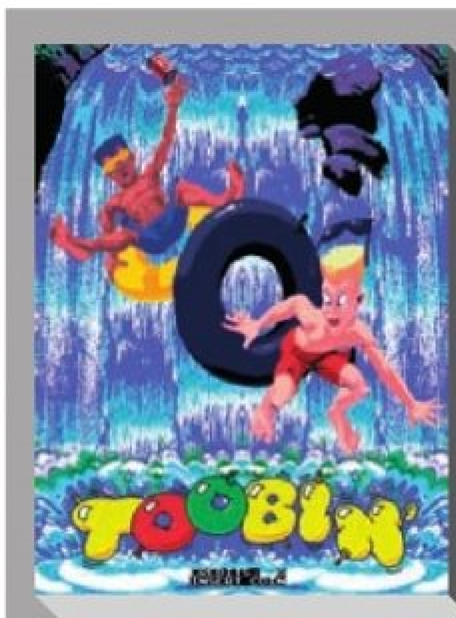
Hidden throughout the river courses are letters that make up the word 'Toobin'. Usually uncovered by throwing cans at sticks and other obstructions in the water, collecting them all was made worthwhile back in the day – as it offered players a prize for doing so. Upon spelling the word, a special screen would flash up telling the player that they had won a *Toobin'* T-shirt. They were instructed to input a few personal details into the cabinet which would give them a code. If they posted it off to Atari, players could claim their prize. Unfortunately, if you want to get your hands on one you're out of luck, the offer ended 23 years ago.

BEST CONVERSION



From shades to Spectrums

The coders did a decent job of condensing this packed and colourful arcade game, with a novel control system, down to 8 and 16-bit computers. The best of a solid bunch of ports, in our opinion, was the impressively slick ZX Spectrum effort by Shaun Hollingworth (of Gremlin Graphics fame), which, though understandably lacking the vibrancy of its arcade counterpart, certainly doesn't scrimp on detail; it also controlled wonderfully well. Our least favourite was the NES conversion. Developed by Tengen, it had awful controls (you couldn't rotate the tube) and suffered from bland, sparse stages.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, C64, NES, GAME BOY COLOR, MSX, AMIGA, DOS
- **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** RACING

What the press said… ages ago



Crash, 83%

"This game captures the excitement and addictiveness of the arcade original. It's especially fun if you get a friend to play against you, and you keep bashing into each other."

What we think

Toobin' was certainly a unique coin-op game, but it's that unusualness and humour that helped it stand out from the pack and makes it worth a play. It's dated surprisingly well, and the action still comes into its own when playing alongside a mate.

RADIANT

As the game that launched a thousand eBay bids hits Xbox Live, Dave McCarthy takes a look back at how the original made its way to the Saturn



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ESP
- » **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE
- » **RELEASED:** 1998
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE, SATURN, XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

Is it possible to write about *Radiant Silvergun* without mentioning how much it costs? Apparently not. But there's a reason for that. Those high prices – anywhere from £100 to £150 for an original copy on eBay at the time of writing – have undoubtedly cemented the game's reputation as a highly sought-after collector's item. Yet they have also obscured its true value as one of the most inspirational videogames of all time.

As much as they have granted the game cult status, those high prices have also limited the number of people who have actually played it, and fuelled suspicions that this was one of those games that only acquired its reputation on the back of limited availability and Japanese quirkiness. In the 13 years since the game's release, first as a coin-op cabinet and then as a Saturn conversion, more people had heard of *Radiant Silvergun* than had actually seen a copy. But with the recent release of the Xbox Live Arcade port, it is, finally, a game that can be loved for the right reasons: as a towering test of both speed and intelligence, a reinvention of the shoot-'em-up genre, and a stern test of your ability to find hidden dogs.

The original coin-op version of the game was put together by a team of just ten people in the slightly dingy, unprepossessing offices of tiny gaming powerhouse Treasure, the mad group of geniuses responsible for other cast-iron classics such as *Guardian Heroes*, *Sin And Punishment* and *Bangai-O*. But when it came to the Saturn release, fancy anime-style interludes were added courtesy of animation studio Gonzo, accentuating the importance of the game's story, which was unusually prominent for a genre that tends to give only the merest nod to any sort of narrative framework.

Radiant Silvergun, by contrast, takes a luxurious – for shoot-'em-ups – hour or so to scroll through









SILVERGUN

a story that takes you on a voyage through the very fabric of time and space. It's a tale that loops right back to the beginning of mankind and culminates in a showdown with a karate-kicking polygonal giant boss, Xiga, capable of unleashing waves of bullets while kicking, punching, leaping and running around a moody, thundercloud-clad background that lurches in all directions, years before *Rez* paid tribute with its running man boss.

So how did Treasure feel about that homage when it appeared a few years later? Masato Maegawa, the president and founder of Treasure, who has had a hand in all of the games the company has produced, displays nothing but enthusiasm. "I thought it was great!" he says. "We had actually done a running man boss before in *Gunstar Heroes* – it was like a recurring motif for us – so when we first saw it in *Rez* it wasn't like we thought they were copying us or anything; it was just a nice confirmation that someone else thought it was a good idea to have a running man boss in a shooting game!"

But *Radiant Silvergun*'s running man was just one highlight of a sequence of dramatic boss encounters, each one demonstrating the game's impressive visual panache and superb use of 2D sprites and 3D spaces. Prefaced with just a stark message across the screen – 'WARNING, NO REFUGE' – bosses would swoosh around the screen before settling into their attack formation, whether that was a wireframe starship or a phoenix-shaped attack craft, each one typical of Treasure's fearless inventiveness and endless ideas.

But exactly where did those ideas come from? One commonly quoted source of inspiration for *Radiant Silvergun* is Irem's *Image Fight*, a coin-op shooter released about ten years earlier, but as Maegawa says, if it hadn't been pointed out, the connection wouldn't have been entirely obvious. "The producer of the game, Hiroshi Iuchi, really loved *Image Fight*, and always mentions it," he laughs. "But when I saw the finished game, it was totally different. I don't know what it's got to do with *Image Fight*." Pressing him on any other sources of inspiration proves to be slightly fruitless: "I don't read comics, I don't watch anime, I don't watch movies or TV, and actually my colleagues are often telling me off for not being up to date." And its genesis didn't even have much to do with any other games, either. "Even at that time people were saying



» [Saturn] Breaking with shoot-'em-up tradition, *Radiant Silvergun* made all seven of its weapons available right from the very start of the game.

"The producer of the game always mentions it, but I don't know what it's got to do with Image Fight"

RADIANT SILVERGUN



“I couldn’t finish the game, so to debug it we had to bring in some top-notch players”

that the shoot-‘em-up was a dying genre. And we had the idea for the game design a long time before it was released, so it wasn’t really influenced by anything around at that time,” says Maegawa.

Indeed, *Radiant Silvergun* was quite unlike anything that had gone before. “We were very happy that shoot-‘em-up fans liked and supported the game,” continues Maegawa. “But it’s not just a standard danmaku [bullet hell] shooter where you have to navigate through a screen full of bullets. It’s almost more like a puzzle shooting game. So we think we created a new category of puzzle shooting games, and that genre has been supported by other shooters, and that’s what we’re most happy with.”

There is certainly an element of bullet hell to *Radiant Silvergun*, and like many Treasure games, a fairly brutal learning curve – precisely because it takes a little while to get your head around those unprecedented puzzle elements. But the game – and, arguably, the entire genre – was transformed by the innovative game mechanics, which borrowed more from puzzle games and RPGs than other shooters. Those sorts of game design quirks are commonplace now, whether it’s collecting jewels to activate slowdown in *Espgaluda*, using spell cards in the *Touhou* series, or grazing bullets to rack up your tension bonus in the *Shikigami No Shiro* games. But at the time it was revolutionary: *Radiant Silvergun* dispensed with the smart bomb and escalating weapon pick-ups that characterised the genre up to that point in favour of an elaborate, dizzyingly complicated framework with which players could unleash a coruscating, creative range of death, destruction and high scores.

The basic structure underlying that framework was the chaining system: killing enemies in sets of three according to their colour – red, blue or yellow – racks up progressively high scores. This means, unusually, that it’s actually in the player’s interest to ignore the majority of enemies. But on top of these basic chains of successive enemies of the same colour, there were also super chains, weapon bonuses, colour bonuses, and even hidden dogs – 30 of them to be unlocked with your lock-on laser to achieve the rank of Dog Master. Indeed, choosing the right weapon at the right time was another element layered on top of the traditional danmaku techniques of memorising attack waves and grazing bullets.

Unlike conventional shoot-‘em-ups, all seven of the game’s weapons were available from the very outset, and players could switch between them at will: standard fire, weaker homing projectiles and wide-angle lasers mapped to the controller’s three buttons, while different combos would produce close-range shots, lock-on lasers, rear fire and the Radiant Sword – capable of absorbing enemy attacks and unleashing a special, invulnerable retaliation. What’s more, in the Saturn version of the game you could power up these attacks as you played, and use them in later games to level off the treacherous slopes of the difficulty curve. And all this set to music by Hitoshi Sakimoto, better known for his work on Square titles but here responsible for a rousing, electronic, orchestral accompaniment.

These puzzle game and RPG elements had evolved into a whole other beast by the time Treasure made *Bangai-O*, but in *Radiant Silvergun* they transformed the game and the genre, and paved the way for games that featured similar gameplay experiments. But they also resulted in a lot of complication, and the game’s near-infinite depths brought with them their own difficulties. Not least of them was that the game was tricky to test.

Surprisingly, for such an unprecedented, complicated game, the actual development

RADIANT HISTORIA

WITH THE ORIGINAL *Radiant Silvergun* so hard to get hold of, many gamers have formed their impression of the game via *Ikaruga*, the game’s spiritual successor, released a few years later for Sega’s NAOMI board and ported for release on the Dreamcast and GameCube. But although the two games share similar mechanics, they’re very different games. *Ikaruga* cuts down *Silvergun*’s three colours to just two, pares back the puzzle elements, and replaces its predecessor’s leisurely pacing with a high-speed half-hour of always-intense action.

Though *Ikaruga* retains *Silvergun*’s technical gloss and superb graphics, there’s none of the weapon levelling that took place in the original, nor that running man boss. The result is a much more streamlined, conventional shoot-’em-up than the original.

“*Ikaruga*’s subtitle was *Radiant Silvergun 2*, so there were common elements and the majority of the development staff were the same,” explains Maegawa when pressed on the issue. “But the connection might not have been so obvious to users; it’s more at the conceptual level.”

Nevertheless, the connection has become even closer, and perhaps more obvious, thanks to the Xbox Live release of *Radiant Silvergun*, which comes complete with an all-new *Ikaruga* mode.



» [Saturn] Sometimes *Radiant Silvergun* feels like a very traditional bullet-hell shooter, with screenfuls of bullets and loads of lasers. Not that it’s a bad thing, in our book.



» [Saturn] An anime intro was added for the Saturn release, courtesy of animation house Gonzo, to explain the story.



» [Saturn] One of the keys to a high score is to pick off your targets wisely, chaining enemies of the same colour.



» [Saturn] And, of course, there are explosions. Lots of them. That look very nice.



» [Saturn] If you look closely, you might just be able to make out one of the game's many hidden dogs.





was relatively straightforward, as Maegawa explains. "At that time there were many projects we worked on that got to a point where we had to restart from scratch – we'd get to a certain point and decide to throw everything out and start again," he says. "But that never happened with *Radiant Silvergun*. It just went really smoothly from start to finish."

In some ways, he admits, it was a little more complicated than making games in the modern era. "In the old days, in the time of *Radiant Silvergun*, all of the programmers and designers were trying to suck every single drop of power out of the hardware to reach the maximum level. Now it's not like that; we have good middleware, so instead of spending our energy to persuade the hardware, we're using middleware to make the process much more efficient."

But, on balance, putting the game together was simple enough, and listening to Maegawa describe the technological environment in which it was created harks back to a simple, more innocent era of game development. "We didn't use any specific 3D tools," he points out. "We used LightWave for 3D objects, but for 2D tools we just used freeware that we downloaded from the internet. And we didn't use any specific or expensive hardware. We just used conventional, normal hardware to create the game."

So it wasn't until the game was largely completed and ready for testing that the real challenge started. "As I mentioned earlier, the development of the game went smoothly, and we didn't encounter any problems," Maegawa continues. "But I actually couldn't finish the game because it was too difficult, so in order to debug it we had to bring in some top-notch players from outside, who held various national records for shooting games. So the debug process was actually the toughest part."

But there was another difficult part to come. If the creative process on *Radiant Silvergun* could be said to have gone relatively smoothly, the same couldn't be guaranteed of the commercial process, of actually unleashing the game on unsuspecting audiences. Although those high-scoring champion gamers gave Treasure some idea of how *Radiant Silvergun* would be received by the genre's dedicated fans, there was no real way of telling what the reaction would be before the game's release because it was so comprehensively different to everything that had gone before.

"It's not like we knew for sure that it was going to be great," says Maegawa. "We certainly knew it was going to be a unique game – it was so different to all of the other shooting games. But that meant that there were positive and negative opinions inside the company, and some anxiety about if the game was going to do well or not."

So much anxiety, in fact, that Maegawa actually went, in person, to watch people playing the game after it came out. "Actually, this was our very first coin-op game, so after it came out in the arcades we went and observed people playing the game, and they played it for a long time, which made us very happy." But did he tell them who he was? "Of course!" he laughs.

Being the diligent, head-down, hard worker that he is, Maegawa probably just told them his name. But he would have been entirely justified if he had introduced himself as the creator of one of the most amazing scrolling shoot-'em-ups of all time – an example of the genre that cemented Treasure's reputation for bending game styles in its ongoing pursuit of digital alchemy.

But if Maegawa could have changed one thing about *Radiant Silvergun*, what would it be? "Well, we had a few thoughts about ways to improve the game," he concludes. "That's why we made the XBLA version!"

ARCADE AUTHENTICITY

IF YOU'RE EXPECTING the recent release of *Radiant Silvergun* to reduce the price of the Saturn original, expect to be disappointed. Plenty of other videogame rarities have sustained their value in the wake of modern remakes and re-releases, and *Radiant Silvergun* has been available to play via MAME and Saturn emulators for a while now without affecting its value.

But if you're looking for authenticity at a slightly lower price, you'll be pleased to know that the Japanese hardware expert Hori has announced a *Radiant Silvergun*-themed controller to coincide with the game's release on Xbox Live. The Real Arcade Pro.EX RS-1 isn't quite the real thing – there are eight buttons instead of three and you can plug in a headset to chat while you're online. But it's packed with the sort of quality Seimitsu parts you'd expect from Japan's foremost peripheral manufacturer – enough to match the excellence of the game itself.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GUARDIAN HEROES
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SEGA SATURN, XBOX LIVE ARCADE
YEAR: 1996

BANGAI-O
SYSTEM: N64, DREAMCAST, NINTENDO DS, XBOX LIVE ARCADE
YEAR: 1999

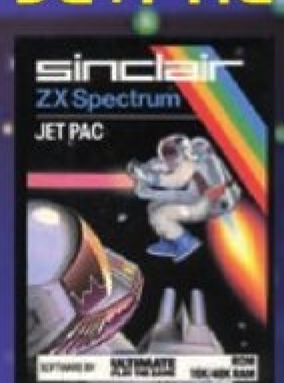
SIN AND PUNISHMENT
SYSTEM: N64, Wii
YEAR: 2000

1983: A Spaceman's Odyssey – The History Of

JETMAN

Jetpac launched Ultimate Play The Game into the very stratosphere of Spectrum gaming, where it remained for the entire duration of its existence. This issue we remember the memorable adventures of Jetman, and ask those with a connection to the character to share with you the impact he had on them

JETPAC



Though the landscape of gaming has forever changed and is very unlikely to ever revert back to how it was, for a long time the games industry was led and dominated by the coin-op industry. Thus, a sizeable gap in technology during the Eighties – separating the innards of arcades and 8-bit home computers – wouldn't deter many developers from transferring popular arcade hits for the home, or stop people from buying them.

Though *Jetpac* never set a toe inside an arcade, for many its appeal and brilliance largely came from the fact that it looked and played liked an arcade game. Its visuals were big, bright, and well detailed, its animation slick and smooth, even the laser weapon fired by its hero conjured up memories of blasting away aliens in *Defender*. And to top it all off, the gameplay was simple to grasp, addictive and above all, bloody challenging. We also hypothesise that *Jetpac*'s space setting came about because at the time the black cosmos was dominating arcade screens. *Jetpac*'s many arcade characteristics come as real no surprise; its authors, the legendary Stamper Brothers, started their careers producing arcade conversion kits, and even the odd arcade game, through their company Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd.

The Stampers of course would eventually turn their backs (for a time at least) on the arcade market to apply their talents to the burgeoning British home computer scene, establishing Ultimate Play The Game as a label with which they would release their home computer software under. Released in 1983, *Jetpac* became the title that kicked off the brothers' new venture and was an impressive and hugely successful debut. Selling over 300,000 copies and netting the company over one million pounds in revenue, it immediately signalled Ultimate Play The Game as a software house to watch, and set the Stampers on their way to becoming household names (well, in households that played videogames, at least).

For those unfamiliar with the game, *Jetpac* saw players assume the role of a treasure-hunting spaceman called Jetman, whose mission it was, as chief test pilot





» [ZX Spectrum] Released in 1983, *Jetpac* proved a wondrous showcase of what a ZX Spectrum was capable of.

for the 'Acme Interstellar Transport Company', to collect and assemble the various parts of dismantled space shuttle kits (in what was possibly a neat homage to the early ZX range of computers) which have been delivered to various planets in the solar system. Once constructed, Jetman had to top-up the ship with enough fuel to achieve lift off and then fly off to his next destination. However, it was mission fraught with both danger and reward as the planets he visited were full of treasures, but also hostile aliens that didn't take too kindly to intruders. Lucky for Jetman, then, that his employer equipped him a handy laser to blast the intergalactic meanies away as he went about his mission. Once airborne, our intrepid looting spaceman would then touchdown on more dangerous pieces of alien terrain to continue his treasure hunt, refuel, and then occasionally assemble a new ship.

Garnering impressive reviews, *Jetpac* would leave a profound effect on a number of Spectrum owners and programmers on its release. Among them Rare senior software engineer Brendan Gunn, who told us that both *Jetpac* and *Lunar Jetman* greatly raised his interest in Ultimate, and ultimately led to a real excitement about getting to work at Rare a few years later.

"*Jetpac* was my favourite game for a long time, and it remains my favourite Ultimate title. I was fascinated by the use of gravity to make the controls interesting; obviously this was central to setting the difficulty of the game. This has undoubtedly been a big influence on my work, as I've always enjoyed using various kinds of 'physics' to enhance the play experience."

Someone else who was duly impressed by the game was Ste Pickford. At the time Ste obviously had no idea that several years later he would be working alongside the Stampers to produce a sequel, but remembers vividly the first time he saw *Jetpac* in action.

"If the theme of Jetpac was to construct, then the theme for the sequel was to destroy"

"My brother John had a ZX Spectrum, which he used to write his first commercially released game – an adventure game called *Ghost Town*, released by Virgin Games. He earned £500 from this, and the first thing he did with the money was buy a 14" colour portable TV, which probably cost about £250 back then. Previously we only had a 10" or 12" black-and-white TV, which he'd written *Ghost Town* on. The second thing he bought was a copy of *Jetpac*. So *Jetpac* was the first game I saw in colour on John's Spectrum, and the first Spectrum game I actually played in colour, and consequently I have a great deal of affection for the game. The thing the stood out to me the most was the laser firing effect. 'That's just like *Defender*,' I thought!"

Someone else who felt *Jetpac* shared similarities with *Defender* was Archer MacLean, who shares with us his first impressions of the game. "My mate up the road had a Spectrum and I first saw both *Jetpac* and *Lunar Jetman* on it. Initially, I remember thinking in 1983 that *Jetpac* was yet another *Defender* clone with the platform game mechanic from *Joust* chucked in for good measure. But it was impressive at the time because the programmers had pushed the limited hardware more than most and it was actually quite playable.

Archer would of course later release his own popular jet-pack-based shooter with his Atari 800 smash *Dropzone* the following year. Curious then as to whether his jet-pack-wearing hero was inspired at all by the Stampers' spaceman in any way, we asked him the question.

"*Dropzone* was pretty much written in 1981/2 on an Atari 800 after extensive playing of *Stargate*, *Defender* and *Robotron* in the arcades. After a break to go to university, I revisited it in 1984 and the main character wearing a

Trailer Trail

It's not uncommon for classic games to breed outlandish wild geese chases for fans. Sometimes they're intentional red herrings conjured up by mischievous programmers, other times they're originated by fans and then simply snowball from there. The latter was exactly what happened in the case of the famous red fish found in *Lunar Jetman*. For a long time many fans believed that the trailer seen pulled by the Hyperglide Moon Rover in the game's loading screen was obtainable. Weight was then given to the theory when *CRASH* printed a reader submitted picture of a screenshot of the game that seemed to show an image of the rover pulling the mythical trailer behind it, causing many readers to embark on a fruitless mission to find it. Of course it was later revealed that the image was a fake, knocked up by a witty practical joker. Keeping the pretence going, though, during an interview with *CRASH* the Stampers were asked about the trailer but didn't confirm either way whether **or not it existed. Not** that we're trying to **reopen the** hunt or anything.



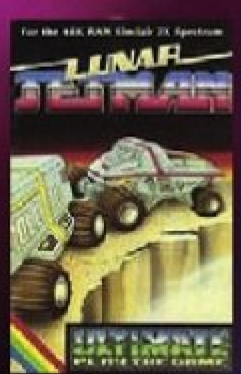


jet-pack was inspired by the fact that I saw a 'Rocket Man' fly into the stadium of the 1984 Olympics in LA, so I replaced my animated spaceship with a jet-pack bloke instead – complete with animated legs swinging about as he moved."





LUNAR JETMAN



If the theme of *Jetpac* was to collect and construct, then the theme of the sequel, released later that year, was to destroy. Following the events of the first game, Jetman crashes on yet another hostile alien planet after his ship – which he spent so bloody long constructing – starts to disintegrate in space. But Jetman's spot of bad luck becomes Earth's good fortune as he learns its inhabitants are plotting a revenge attack on his home planet in a bid to secure some valuable minerals for themselves. The new mission standing before our hapless hero is to destroy a series of alien missile salvos before they launch an attack on Earth.

To save Earth, Jetman must explore the surface of the planet, picking up bombs and ferrying the fragile payloads to various alien bases to destroy them. Jetman finds a Hyperglide Moon Rover on the planet's surface that he can use to drive the bombs to their target destinations without getting hurt by the flying alien meanies outside, effectively making him invulnerable to attack. However, this brought its own issue: the planet's ground is deformable, and the rover, despite having massive beefy tyres, could only travel over perfectly flat ground. Therefore, any potholes on the planets surface required bridging by Jetman, and this would mean him repeatedly hopping in and out of the Rover to plug the holes. Along the way Jetman could also find various equipment to aid him on his mission; this included a handy cannon that could be fitted to the Rover vehicle to blast the colourful alien hordes, and even a handy pair of teleporters that could be used as a way to get around the planet's surface quicker.

If Jetman failed to destroy his target in an allotted time then two missiles would be launched from the alien base – one targeted at earth and the other at the Rover vehicle. If this happens, though, it was possible for Jetman to intercept and destroy the missiles by blasting them with his laser, although with each subsequent level reached the amount of laser fire required to destroy them increased.

With scrolling levels, a drivable vehicle, our hero now having to continually top-up his fuel to stay airborne, and players given two different methods to complete their missions – either carrying the bomb manually or fiddling around with the Rover to transport it under the protection of cover – *Lunar Jetman* was definitely a far more intricate game than its predecessor.





» [ZX Spectrum] *Lunar Jetman* was one of a small number of titles compatible with the Currah Microspeech add-on, giving it some creepy speech effects.



"I'm ashamed to admit I only ever had an illegal copy of *Lunar Jetman*, and as a result I never gave it sufficient time to really get into it," remembers Rare's Brendan Gunn. "I loved the idea of taking the core mechanic of *Jetpac* and expanding it with the addition of things like the moon buggy, the bridging kits and the teleporter. Sadly, I found it just too hard, and I didn't play it enough to master it. I played it a couple of months ago and really enjoyed it. I just wish I'd given it more attention back in the day. Certainly these two games greatly raised my interest in Ultimate, and that in turn led to a real excitement about getting to work at Rare a few years later."

Despite the increase in challenge the sequel posed, most fans still regarded *Lunar Jetman* as an enhancement over the original. Among its fans, *CRASH* editor Roger Kean. "I thought *Jetpac* amazing at the time, the first game that had large sprites which actually resembled the objects they were supposed to be. And then *Lunar Jetman* went even further, with better sprites and a deeper gameplay. And of course there was the mythical trailer hidden somewhere which became both the fantasy of tipsters and the reality of budding Speccy artists, all of which *CRASH* published to further drive game players to distraction in their search for it."

Loony Jetman

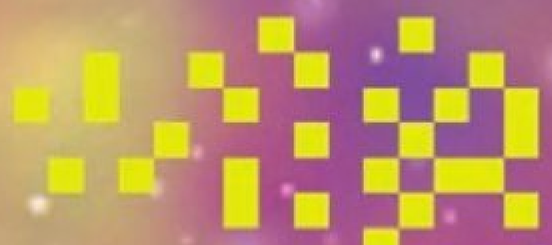
Beginning in issue six and lasting up to issue 93, John Richardson's humorous *Loony Jetman* comic strip quickly became the thing many readers of *CRASH* flicked too first. In fact, it became so popular that Newsfield offices would be flooded with letters from disgruntled readers whenever the strip failed to appear one month. If you missed our making-of *Starquake* in issue 89, then you might be unaware that the much-loved comic can also be thanked for bringing about the birth of its hero. When creating BLOB for *Starquake*, programmer Stephen Crow was inspired by a peripheral big-eyed droid character that occasionally appeared in the comic's panels. An important and inspiring piece of Spectrum history, *CRASH* editor Roger Kean reveals how the iconic strip came to be.

"First off, I couldn't remember how many *Lunar Jetman* (Loony) strips John Richardson did and was astonished to find out. He kicked off in issue six (July 84) and kept it up all the way to issue 93 (Oct 91), only missing issues 24, 29, 32 and 50, although issue 57 was a placeholder, which he made up for in the following one with two pages. Issue 59 went into colour and then from issue 64 to 93, they were all in colour.

"In those early days of pre-press technology, we photographed the *Jetman* art boards on a PMT (photo-mechanical-tone) process camera to film for printing. It tended to be a longer-than-usual process because the camera operator (Matthew Uffindell) spent the time reading the page, and the gales of laughter from within the camera room indicated what was being dealt with.

"From the very first issue, Tim and Chris Stamper liked *CRASH*, evidenced by the detailed interview/visit we did, the only magazine to have the privilege of being allowed inside Ultimate Play The Game. I can't remember whose idea it was to turn *Jetman* into a comic strip, especially a daft one, theirs or ours, but it showed their confidence in their character and in us to turn Jetman The Hero into Jetman The Loony. And I no longer remember who introduced us to John Richardson, but it was inspired. The strip rapidly became a must and we received complaints by the tonne-load when those few issues went missing a strip."









Jetpac Refuelled

Of course it would be remiss of us to write a history of the *Jetman* series without touching on *Jetpac Refuelled*: Rare's splendid 2007 HD remake of the 1983 Spectrum classic. It was a fantastic early XBLA title, and marked the company's first ever release for the service. It featured the original Spectrum port as well a brand new, polished, beefed up revamp boasting a fresh lick of HD paint. It also featured larger playing fields, the option to upgrade Jetman's laser weapon, and was complemented with all new co-op play and a smattering of competitive multiplayer modes for fans to get stuck into – suffice to say the latter was a respectful update that breathed new life into the Spectrum classic. Those who wish to find out more should be sure to check out issue 39 of **Retro Gamer**, which featured an in-depth making-of the game.



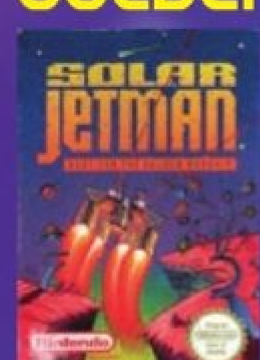








SOLAR JETMAN: HUNT FOR THE GOLDEN WARSHIP



Following very big things with Ultimate, the Stamper Brothers once again changed the focus of their business: this time waving goodbye the British home computer market, and with it the Ultimate name (selling it to US Gold, but then later buying back the rights to their IP a few years later), to make an early break into the burgeoning home console market with a new company that they called Rare. When Rare became one of the first Western developers to be granted a license by Nintendo to produce games for the Nintendo Entertainment System, it once again proved to be another deft business manoeuvre by the brothers. This lucrative relationship marking another purple patch as Rare produced a huge number of NES games, beginning with the into-the-screen ski-themed racer *Slalom*.

Ramping up production as popularity of the NES rocketed and demand grew, Rare began employing more staff, and occasionally entrusted production of projects to a third-party developer.

Founded by brothers Ste and John Pickford, Zippo Games' first project for Rare was *Wizards & Warriors* sequel, *Ironsword*. The success and popularity its sequel garnered led to the studio getting more work from the Leicestershire-based Rare, although Ste admits at the time he wasn't overjoyed to be working on another sequel.

"We wanted to make our own games." Ste remembers. "We'd already designed and developed *Ironsword*, and didn't really want to do any more of that kind of work. But, if we were going to do a sequel to anything, it may have well been something we liked, and I think we all liked both the original *Jetpac*, and the *Looney Jetman* comic strip."

Ironically enough given Ste's admission, *Solar Jetman* actually began life as an original Zippo production. "The project actually started as on original game called *Iota*, which we came up with at our studio Zippo Games. It was conceived by the programmer Steve Hughes, and it was partly inspired by *Oids* which was big on the Atari ST at the time, and of course *Thrust* – but with some new ideas and twists. Although it was our original game, we were being funded by Rare, and at some point about halfway through the game they just told us out-of-the blue that it was going to be *Solar Jetman*. No discussion or anything."

With Zippo Games being entrusted with one of the Stamper's most revered series, pressure was naturally on to deliver something that would live up to the previous two games in the series. Surprisingly, Zippo would receive little input from Rare with regard to how the game would look and play, the Stampers clearly confident in their abilities.

"I enjoyed working with the Stampers," Ste told us. "They were very sharp, very focused, and very clear about what they wanted, and every meeting we had would start about discussing the game but end up with hours spent talking about videogames in general and the state of the industry. They were also quite ruthless, though, and never paid us very well or gave us much in the way of royalties!"

With talk returning to the game, though, we ask Ste to explain where, apart from the obvious, he drew inspiration for *Solar Jetman*?

"My own personal inspiration was *Scuba Dive* by Durrell on the Spectrum," he explained. "I spent hours and hours playing that game, and loved the feeling you got from slowly exploring deeper and deeper caves, and I always wanted to recapture that feeling in the levels I built. So although it's not a completely original game, I think we took inspiration from enough different sources – and added enough of our own ideas – to make a game that was reasonably fresh and interesting."

And how large was the team that worked on the game and how long did the project take to complete? "I think it took quite a while – longer than it should have



anyway! Perhaps **around a year?** It started off as a **two-man team,** Steve the programmer (and game designer) and Lyndon the artist (and level designer), which was typical of the way we made games at the time. We had a bit of a re-jig about 60 per cent of the way through the game, when John and I got involved and we did a sort of redesign, threw away most of the existing levels and rearranged the structure of the game, keeping most of the code and about half of the graphics assets, then I spent a few months working with Lyndon on new graphics and level design. So two people for 60 per cent of the development then three or four for the rest. The music was done by the guy at Rare."

The eight-way scrolling levels were much larger in scale and players began each stage steering an unwieldy pod that moved subject to inertia. The aim of the game was to explore the dangerous cavernous planets for fuel, Golden War parts and upgrades for their ship and then drop them into the base. Each planet featured different enemies and its own gravitational properties, and if the pod was destroyed, control would then fall to Jetman, who was more agile but notably weaker.

“The Spectrum Jetman titles each offered a unique approach to fetch-for-survival gameplay”

The Spectrum *Jetman* titles each offered a unique approach to fetch-for-survival gameplay, and *Solar Jetman* was no different. Set across twelve planets, plus one secret planet for players to find, it saw Jetman trying to find and assemble the parts that made up the titular Golden Warship. And also in fine *Jetman* tradition, it was no walk in the park.

"I think that was my idea, although my memory may be playing tricks on me. That was a key idea which made the game work, and was added fairly late in the big redesign. It was essential a rip-off of the idea in *Mario* where growing big from a mushroom is effectively an extra life, as you can survive one hit. The game always had the shield, but adding the extra stage of losing your ship but staying alive as a vulnerable Jetman really improved the game, and gave a great feeling of 'just about' surviving a difficult battle if you managed to fly away safely."

A maddening but logical mechanic, items could only be transported by Jetman when he was piloting a pod, pulled to the target destination by a tow cable. Therefore, whenever his ship was destroyed, players would be required to return to base and pick up another ship to continue their mission. Ste was concerned, though, that the to-and-fro might start to feel like a chore for the player, and so during the redesign process he and the team thought up ways to soften the challenge and make the game more enjoyable.

"There was a danger of massive levels being long and boring, and it being tedious to bring items back a long way to the ship, and unsatisfying difficult to fight baddies while also controlling your ship which was being pulled by a weight which you had to protect. It could (and at times during development, did) add up to a clever but annoying game mechanic. A lot of the work we did on the big redesign half way through was to make the game fun by tweaking the baddie AI, adding shortcut/teleports, and generally making it more enjoyable and feel less like work."

Sister ports of *Solar Jetman* were planned for the Amiga and C64, developed by Software Creations, and at one stage a ZX Spectrum version was in the works. None of these conversions sadly saw release, although the Spectrum port was previewed in issue 86 of *CRASH*. In the article, programmer Tony Williams talked briefly about the struggles of porting a NES game to the Spectrum and explained how it was going to be a 128K game only, it even showed off a couple of early screenshots. Sadly, Ste told us he was never involved or saw any of the ports and thus was unfortunately was unable to **shed any new light on their mysterious disappearance.**



» [PC] Fans should take the time check out Andy Noble's 2002 freeware remake/revamp of *Lunar Jetman*. It's good and free.



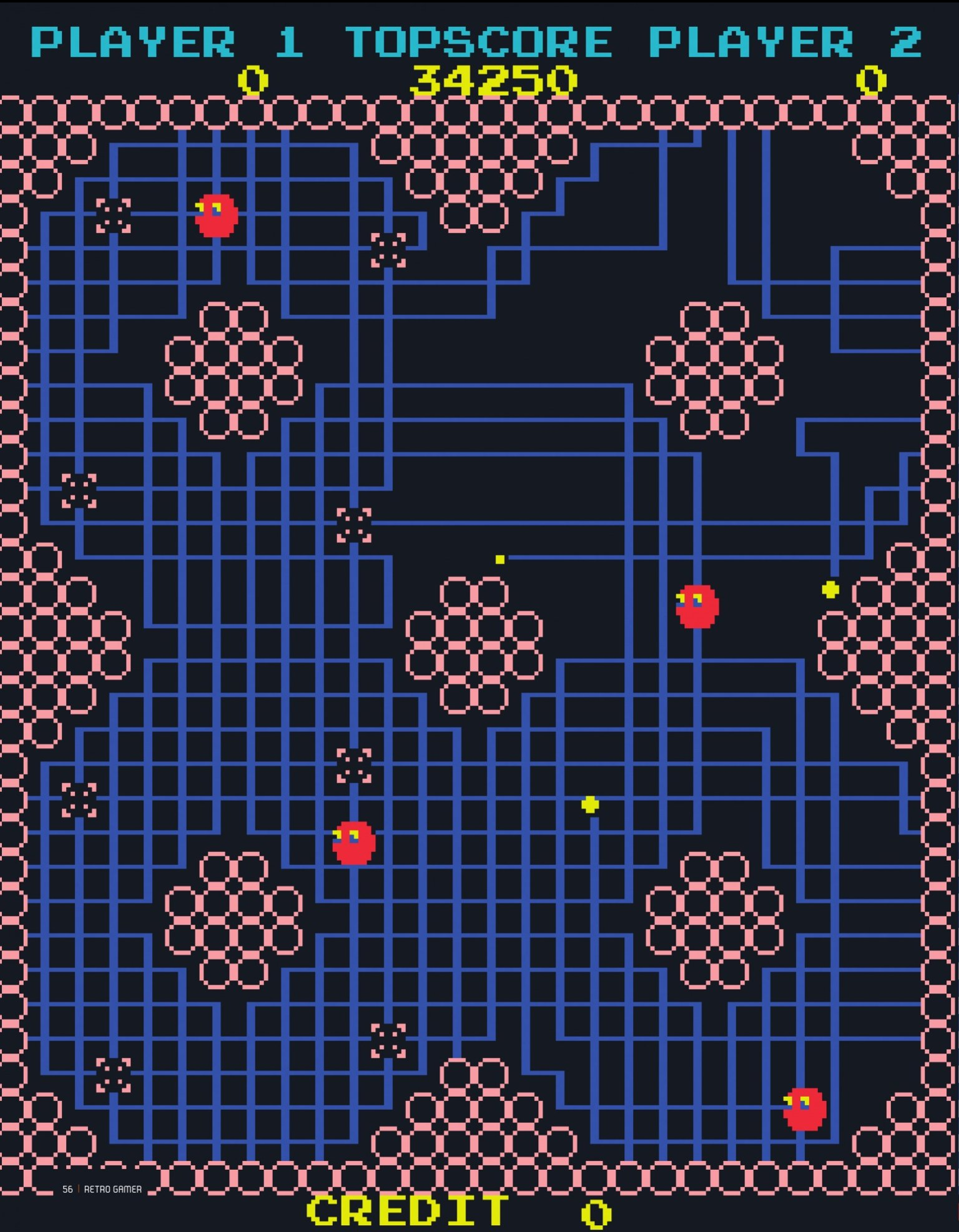
» [BBC Micro] Both *Jetpac* and *Lunar Jetman* saw release for the BBC Micro, *Jetpac* was also ported to the VIC-20.



» [NES] *Solar Jetman* meshes together elements of *Jetpac* and *Lunar Jetman*. The result is a cracking NES game that can be picked up for next to nothing these days.



Special thanks to Adrian Mitchell for his excellent scan


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Mr TNT

'I PITY THE FOOL!' NO WAIT, THAT'S NOT RIGHT

» RETROREVIVAL

» ARCADE
» TELKO
» 1983

Following the huge success of *Pac-Man*, many developers released games with variations of its dot-munch gameplay in a bid to capitalise on its popularity. A great many of these were entirely forgettable, of course, offering players nothing new or innovative over what we'd seen before… but not all of them.

One such example is *Mr TNT* from Telko, a relatively obscure arcade game that received a pretty decent and exclusive Commodore 64 port by HES Software. It basically plays like a neat mixture of *Pac-Man* and *Qix*, and its gameplay is fast, frantic and really quite good fun.

Assuming the role of the titular *Mr TNT* (who resembles the highly unlikely lovechild of Pac-Man and his spectral nemesis Blinky the ghost), your aim was to get pick-ups dotted around a network of lines. However, there were a few things that needed to be considered. Firstly, when Mr TNT moves across a line he gradually erases it from the grid. Second, deadly sparks move around the network and will hone in on his position, killing him if he comes in contact. And finally, and rather nicely, there was an alternative way to complete a stage: simply diffuse the situation by coercing the sparks onto lines that lead them to a dead-end, which will snuff them out.

The best aspect about *Mr TNT* is the way in which its gameplay gradually cranks up the tension. The further you get, the fewer number of lines there are on the grid for everything to move around on, and this results in some pretty tense dashes to the finish as you sweep up the final few pick-ups in order to clear the round.

While some may get frustrated by its unforgiving control system – you have to time a change of direction perfectly otherwise Mr TNT will remain on his current course and very often travel straight into the path of an enemy spark – get the knack of it and *Mr TNT* will most likely surprise you. It's an entertaining and imaginative take on a classic that really deserves highlighting. If you're any sort of fan of dot-munch games, you'll find *Mr TNT* a real blast. *

TOP 25 COMMODORE 64 GAMES OF ALL TIME

How do you decide the best games for the Commodore 64? Do you focus on exclusives, arcade ports, or original ideas? Do you champion the obscure, or back the bona fide classics? After weeks of deliberation, we simply passed it over to members of the forum, and saved ourselves a massive headache…





Stunt Car Racer

■ **Year:** 1989
■ **Publisher:** MicroStyle

25 **It's a testament to Geoff Crammond's skill as a coder that two of his three C64 games made your list. *Stunt Car Racer* managed to combine Geoff's love of physics with the thrills and spills of the arcade racers that were popular at the time.**

Yes, it's not as good as the Amiga version, but in many ways *Stunt Car Racer* remains an astonishing achievement on the C64 thanks to its slick engine, carefully crafted track design and wonderfully tight controls.

Even today, *Stunt Car Racer* is fun to play, largely because of the aforementioned physics and intricate track design, which have really stood the test of time. You're required to learn every inch of the track in order to master it, but the sense of achievement you receive when you do is unmatched.



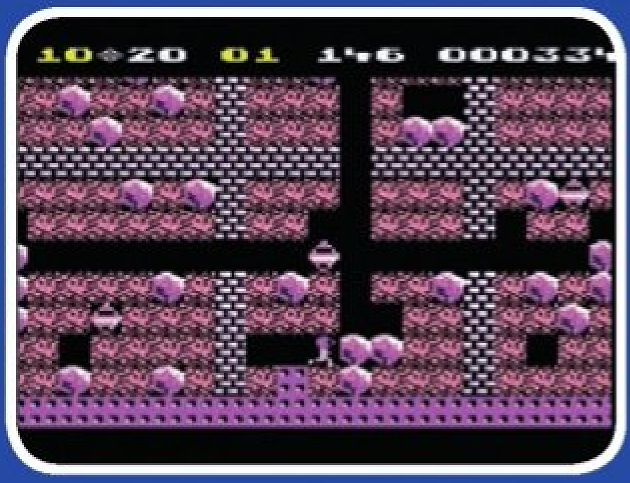
The Sentinel

■ **Year:** 1986
■ **Publisher:** Firebird

24 **Although best known for his racing games, Geoff Crammond wasn't afraid to step out of his comfort zone in order to deliver genuinely engaging experiences.**

The Sentinel is arguably one of his most surreal and imaginative games, offering a cerebral challenge that few other titles on the C64 can match. Indeed, from the moment you witness Bob Stevenson's iconic loading screen, you know you're about to play something special.

Using the absorbing skills of your Synthoid, you must reach the highest point of each of the 10,000 levels and absorb the titular Sentinel without it spotting you. Interestingly, the slow drawing process of the C64 version – compared to its 16-bit counterparts – actually added to the game, creating an unbearable tension that, in turn, made it utterly unique. It was simply masterful, and highly challenging.



Boulder Dash

■ **Year:** 1984
■ **Publisher:** First Star Software

23 **First released on Atari's 8-bit range of computers, *Boulder Dash* would go on to have massive success across a staggering range of home computers and consoles. The C64 version was no different, and it remains one of the best puzzle games on the system, thanks to the super-cute hero Rockford – who became so popular that he infiltrated the pages of *Zzap!64* – as well as the deviously designed mazes that developer Peter Liepa created.**

While it shared many similarities with Taito's obscure arcade game, *The Pit*, Liepa's *Boulder Dash* nevertheless stood proudly on its own two feet. It enhanced Taito's formulae by introducing all manner of new gameplay mechanics: the huge, multi-scrolling stages filled with precious diamonds for Rockford to collect, and deadly hazards for him to avoid. It's a timeless classic.





" Super-cute hero Rockford became so popular that he infiltrated the pages of Zzap!64 magazine "

Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior

■ **Year:** 1987
■ **Publisher:** Palace Software

22 **Even without that infamous cover, starring a scantily-clad page three model, *Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior* was always going to be a rip-roaring success. Heavily inspired by Frank Frazetta's stunning fantasy art and *Conan The Barbarian*, Palace Software dreamt up a beautifully brutal fighter that, in addition to still playing brilliantly, also managed to offer a sense of danger that, even now, can't be beaten.**

We are of course talking about the infamous decapitation move that would immediately end a battle should you get the timing right. While tough to pull off against later computer, or human, opponents, the sense of satisfaction it offered remains unmatched. Steeped in atmosphere and with a rich sense of black humour – the goblin booting a head off screen never fails to raise a smile – *Barbarian* remains an excellent fighter and one of the best 8-bit brawlers on any system.















California Games

■ **Year:** 1987

■ **Publisher:** Epyx

21 **Epyx released a number of classic sports games for the C64, but this sterling effort from 1987 is the one you all appear to love the most. Although it didn't offer as many events as its predecessor, *World Games, California Games* nevertheless managed to impress gamers thanks to its excellent animation, super presentation and the sheer variety found in the six included events: which ranged from half-pipe and roller skating to surfing, footbag and frisbee throwing.**

As with past games in the series, accessibility and easy to follow instructions were the key to *California Games'* success, with each event being easy to learn, but difficult to master. Learn it you would, though, if only so you could completely hammer (up to seven) friends' attempts on each event. As bright and breezy as the state it was based on.



Leaderboard

■ **Year:** 1986

■ **Publisher:** Access Software

20 **With many in the gaming world now obsessed with the yearly antics of Tiger Woods and the PGA, it's easy to forget that it all started with Access Software's sublime *Leaderboard*. Now, admittedly it wasn't the first ever golf game to appear on a home micro, but it's hard to remember a version that was this comprehensive and accessible.**

Leaderboard had everything you'd expect from a cutting-edge golf game. There were four exceptionally detailed courses to choose from, three modes: Novice, Amateur and Professional, and 14 distinct types of clubs, making it an amazingly comprehensive package. By far the best aspect of *Leaderboard*, though, was its excellent control mechanics, which gave you a previously unseen amount of control when striking the ball.

It's long been surpassed by other golf games, with the developers going on to create the excellent *World Class Leaderboard*, but the original still remains the perfect example of a title that transcends its typical audience to appeal to an even larger group of people.







The Way Of The Exploding Fist

■ **Year:** 1985

■ **Publisher:** Melbourne House

19 **From the moment you first laid eyes on *Fist*, it was obvious where its inspiration had come from. It was clear to reviewers as well, many of who proclaimed it to be the best version of *Karate Champ* they'd ever played, despite the fact that it was a standalone effort.**

Yes, there were obviously similarities between both *Fist* and *Karate Champ*, but we'd argue that Beam Software's effort was the better game. For starters, it looked fantastic, with super-slick animation that gave the on-screen combatants plenty of life. While it was unable to match the impressive number of moves found in *Karate Champ*, it still featured a decent repertoire, all of which you would have to master if you wanted to reach the later stages and achieve the revered tenth Dan rank.

The Way Of The Exploding Fist was the first home computer fighting game to genuinely feel as slick as its arcade counterparts, and remains a fun, tactical little fighter.





Myth: History In The Making

■ **Year:** 1989
■ **Publisher:** System 3

18 **System 3 could seemingly do no wrong on the C64, with its 12 reviewed games in *Zzap64!* receiving an average score of 90 per cent. Of course, when you consider games like *Myth*, those high scores begin to make sense.**

Myth: History In The Making was a truly epic adventure that eschewed the distinct isometric approach of System 3's games for a more traditional side-on scroller that saw its hero battling all manner of mythological creatures as he travelled through time.

Initially armed with just his fist and feet, the unnamed hero was able to gain access to a variety of different weapons as his adventure progressed. Weapons were needed as well, as *Myth* could be tough in places, requiring deft reflexes to survive. You'd battle on, though, as Peter Baron and Bob Stevenson had created a truly stunning game, with huge multi-load levels that perfectly captured the mythology that it was inspired by.





Delta

■ **Year:** 1987
■ **Publisher:** Thalamus Ltd

17 **When it came to shoot-'em-ups the C64 was untouchable. Thanks to its super fast scrolling, it was able to recreate an arcade-like experience that its 8-bit peers often struggled to match, and as a result, it had many great exclusives.**

One such example was Thalamus's *Delta*, an impossibly slick horizontal-scrolling shooter that boasted highly stylised graphics, challenging attack patterns and ridiculously huge bosses. Fuelled by a suitably manic score from Rob Hubbard (there was even a sound mixer for creating your own tune while the game loaded) *Delta* featured a fun power-up system where you collected credits to boost various aspects of your ship, a nice take on the mechanics that were popular at the time.

It suffers now from relying a little too much on memorising attack patterns, and ensuring you have the right weapons for the right areas, but this is a fault that can also be levelled at Konami's *Gradius* (which *Delta* is very similar to).





"Thanks to its super fast scrolling, the C64 could recreate an arcade-like experience"





Maniac Mansion

■ **Year:** 1987
■ **Publisher:** LucasFilm Games

16 **If you read our exhaustive 'Making Of' in issue 94, you'll know just why LucasFilm's superb game made this list. If you didn't, then allow us to illuminate you. Created using the now legendary SCUMM engine, *Maniac Mansion* saw three kids exploring the titular house in search of a missing cheerleader called Sandy – discovering a bunch of wacky protagonists and devious puzzles on the way.**

Creators Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick were given free rein over *Mansion*'s creation, and it can be seen in every nook and cranny of the huge house you have to explore. Characters are memorable and spout genuinely amusing zingers, the puzzles are extremely well thought out, while the intelligent cursor makes it incredibly easy to manipulate your surroundings and interact with the objects and characters. A genuinely entertaining adventure that needs revisiting.









Last Ninja 2

■ **Year:** 1988
■ **Publisher:** System 3

15

There was more to *The Last Ninja*'s hit sequel than just a change of scenery and location, much more. For starters, it was a massive graphical improvement over the already impressive original, with detailed locations from John Twiddy that perfectly captured the atmosphere of New York. Technically impressive, skyscrapers soared ever upwards, levels were packed with detail and the Last Ninja and his counterparts featured far better animation than their critically acclaimed predecessor. Add in an extremely atmospheric soundtrack from Matt Gray and System 3's sequel was an aesthetic delight.

But there was more to *Last Ninja 2* than just pretty visuals; its gameplay had improved significantly to its predecessor as well. The vast majority of *Last Ninja 2*'s gameplay still revolved around you seeking out specific items that would give you access to the next beautifully detailed area, but the puzzles were far cleverer than they were in *The Last Ninja*. Combat and jumping were also greatly improved as well, not requiring the pixel-perfect timing that plagued the original game. It still suffers from the clunky controls of the original, and many preferred the oriental setting of part one, but System 3's sequel remains a shining example of subtly improving on an already great concept.





Buggy Boy

■ **Year:** 1987
■ **Publisher:** Elite

14

Considering how popular arcade conversions were on the 8-bit systems, only two conversions have actually made your list. The first is Elite's port of Tatsumi's *Buggy Boy*. The second… Well you'll find out in a couple of pages.

What's interesting about *Buggy Boy* is that while it struggles to capture the bright and breezy cartoon visuals of the original arcade game, it nails the actual gameplay, delivering a conversion that *feels* like Tatsumi's popular racer, even if it isn't identical. Perhaps realising that the C64 was never going to accurately recreate the thrills and spills of Tatsumi's racer, Elite instead tried to make the best possible racer that it could – the end results were impressive to say the least.

Dave Thomas' slick coding allowed for some brilliantly precise handling that made controlling your buggy a lot of fun. The scrolling was extremely smooth as well, and it ran at a great speed, delivering an excellent off-road racing experience that few other games could match. It may have only boasted five courses, but the finely honed gameplay kept you going back for more.

"Trenz delivered a stunning masterpiece that effortlessly improved on his original game and made the jaws of non-C64 owners drop to the floor"

Turrican II: The Final Fight

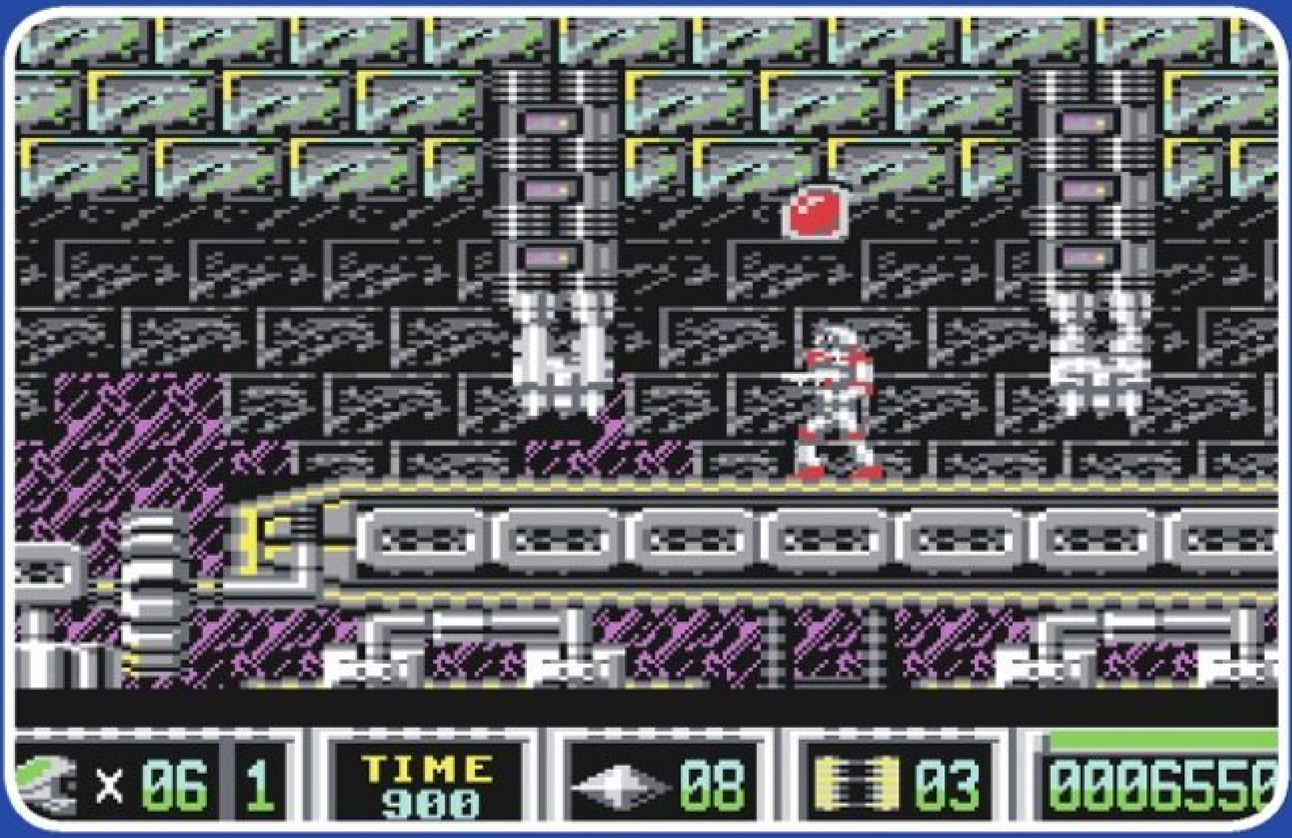
■ **Year:** 1991
■ **Publisher:** Rainbow Arts

13

***Turrican* was an amazing C64 game that made developer Manfred Trenz a household name. A sequel was inevitable as night following day, but how do you improve on such a killer formulae? If you're Manfred Trenz, you make everything bigger, bolder and better than before and included another storming score from Chris Hülsbeck. Oh, and you add an excellent shoot-'em-up level into the mix as well.**



Turrican II is trashy, excessive, over-the-top, but most of all is fun. After honing his coding skills on the likes of *Denaris*, *Katakis* and the original *Turrican*, Trenz delivered a stunning masterpiece that effortlessly improved on his original game and made the jaws of non-C64 owners drop to the floor. Filled with the sort of kinetic action that was readily available in the arcade games that Manfred so loved, and featuring some truly mind-blowing enemies (the final boss towers three screens high) *Turrican II: The Final Fight* was a technically accomplished videogame that had great gameplay to back up its stupendous visuals. A perfect sequel that improves on the original in every possible way.









Elite

■ **Year:** 1985

■ **Publisher:** Firebird

12

We were somewhat surprised to see *Elite* just outside the top ten, as the C64 version is widely regarded as one of the best iterations of the game. Surprise aside, it's still easy to see why *Elite* charted so highly, because it remains a phenomenal achievement, squeezing an amazing universe of possibilities into just 32k.

The C64 version arrived some eight months after the original BBC version, but made up for its tardiness with additional 'special missions', the inclusion of Trumbles (a homage to *Star Trek*'s Tribbles), and a rendition of The Blue Danube Waltz, which plays whenever you dock. Bugs had also been eradicated, giving C64 owners a more solid version that was only really let down by its slower running speed.

Fortunately, *Elite*'s focus on exploration meant that the slower pace wasn't an issue and it went on to be spoken of in the same revered tones as its BBC predecessor. A true classic that paved the way for future flight simulators and open-world games.



Kik Start II

■ **Year:** 1987

■ **Publisher:** Mastertronic

10

***Kik Start* was a huge success for Mastertronic, proving that a £1.99 game was just as good (and sometimes better) as a full-priced release. Shaun Southern's sequel blew the already excellent original out of the water, delivering far better visuals, more courses, and best of all, an utterly superb level editor.**

Gameplay-wise *Kik Start*'s sequel is very similar to the original, with you (and another player in the excellent verses mode) racing across five chosen courses as quickly as possible. This time, though, the controls had been greatly refined, allowing for far better precision, which made it a lot easier to judge the speed to tackle certain hazards at. Yes, it can be annoyingly fiddly, but the sense of satisfaction you receive on a flawless run is immense.

And let's not forget *Kik Start II*'s sprawling level editor. Sure, it takes a little while to get to grips with it, but once mastered you increase *Kik Start II*'s appeal tenfold. 24 courses was already a massive improvement on the eight found in *Kik Start*, but Shaun's comprehensive level editor meant it would last as long as your imagination did.









The Last Ninja

■ **Year:** 1987

■ **Publisher:** System 3

11

We're guessing that nostalgia, rather than common sense, is the main reason *The Last Ninja* sits higher than its superior sequel. Having said that, it's still an expertly crafted adventure and it's a testament to developer John Twiddy that no other game featured in your list along with its sequel.

The multi-load adventure was set across six distinct areas and saw the titular ninja, Armakuni, trying to defeat the evil shogun, Kunitoki. As with its sequel, *The Last Ninja* featured a healthy mix of exploration and combat, but was let down by some truly obscure puzzles and tricky jumping sections that still have us wailing with frustration whenever we attempt them.

And yet John's game still does a lot right, thanks to its incredibly atmospheric levels, gorgeous design and an incredibly slick engine, which in many ways feels like the sort of 3D world that Ultimate created for the humble Spectrum. Even with its many niggles, there's no denying the appeal of System 3's game and it's little surprise that it remains to be held in such high esteem. What a pity that we're never likely to see Armakuni go on any future adventures.











Bruce Lee

■ **Year:** 1984
■ **Publisher:** US Gold

9

A Bruce Lee game about collecting lanterns sounds like a recipe for disaster, but the reality couldn't be further from the truth.

Bruce Lee, like *Boulder Dash*, started off life on the Atari 8-bits, before moving over to other systems. It's an interesting hodgepodge of genres, successfully combining – admittedly limited – fighting moves with fluid, fast-paced platforming. It works well, with Bruce having to rush around each stage collecting lanterns in order to reach the next area. Spanners are thrown in the works with the inclusion of a lithe ninja, and the Green Yamo, who continually chases Bruce around the beautiful levels.

One of the best aspects of *Bruce Lee*, which still holds true to this day, is the way you can approach each stage. Do you simply pummel your way to victory or rely on simple speed? Either way, the end result is a masterful hybrid that's still resounding fun to play.







Thrust

■ **Year:** 1986
■ **Publisher:** Firebird

8

Like many hit 8-bit games, Firebird's *Thrust* owes its creation to a classic arcade game – in this case, *Gravitar*. In many ways, though, Jeremy Smith's offering is a far better videogame, subtly taking elements from the arcade original template, but stamping its own ideas all over it.

Thrust was never going to win awards for its minimalist visuals, with many gamers and reviewers calling it dated on its release, but Jeremy's focus wasn't on cutting-edge graphics, it was on delivering an authentic world for your spacecraft to explore – a task he achieved easily.

Thrust required you to do little more than explore the alien terrain and recover a set-number of fuel pods. The snag here, however, was that you had to get used to both *Thrust*'s realistic physics and deviously placed enemy ships. Part puzzle, part shooter, *Thrust* required you to be quick on your trigger finger while mastering your ship's delicate control system. It's a beautiful marriage of mechanics that still stands the test of time.





Bubble Bobble

■ **Year:** 1987
■ **Publisher:** Firebird

7

24 years after its original release and we still can't believe that Ste Ruddy was able to cram Taito's hit coin-op into the C64. Even after he revealed all in issue 95, it remains a phenomenal achievement, even if it isn't quite as arcade perfect as many made it out to be at the time.

In 1987, though, *Bubble Bobble* on the C64 felt like a revelation. Ste Ruddy's conversions was simply astonishing, with great sprite work, authentic level design and plenty of secrets that had been tucked away in the original arcade game. He even managed to get one of the secret levels in, bless him – impressive work when you consider that Ste had no inside help at all from *Bubble Bobble*'s original creators, and had to base all his experience on his own play-throughs. Ste's stupendously good work is further complemented by a wonderfully authentic version of the unmistakable theme tune from Peter Clarke, which adds further to an already excellent conversion. *Bubble Bobble*'s sequel also received a fine conversion (from Graftgold), but it still couldn't top Ste's effort with the original game.

In short, we'd argue that *Bubble Bobble* is the best arcade conversion on Commodore's machine, and judging by the sheer number of you who voted for it, it would appear that you're in complete agreement.



"It was never going to win awards for its minimalist visuals, but it delivered an authentic world"





Armalyte

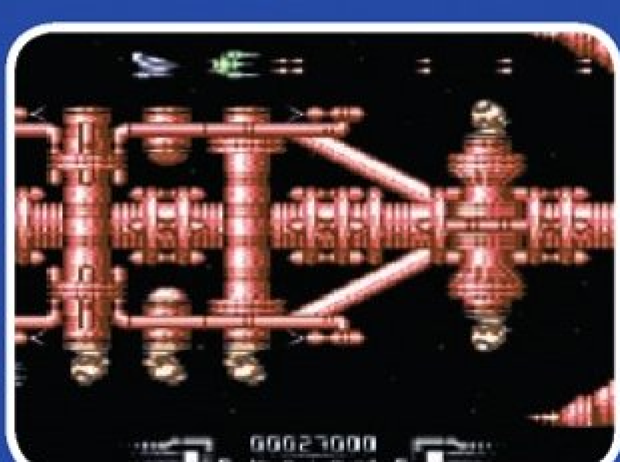
■ **Year:** 1988
■ **Publisher:** Thalamus Ltd

6

***Armalyte* is further proof that the C64 was the computer to own if you loved shoot-'em-ups. From its metallic-tinted visuals to its awesome boss designs, everything about *Armalyte* screams epic. Coded by Dan Philips and John Kemp, with graphic duties by Robin Levy and a punchy soundtrack from Martin Walker, *Armalyte* is a gorgeous game that calls to mind classic arcade hits such as *Nemesis* and *Salamander*.**

More importantly, however, *Armalyte*'s game design is every bit as meticulously designed as its scintillating visuals. Enemies are cleverly placed, offering a stiff, but not overtly unfair, challenge, while the actual level design is superb, offering plenty of areas where pinpoint movement is just as important as shooting accuracy. Power-ups are also of a high standard, and while they're not original, they all pack a meaty punch and are extremely satisfying to use.

Armalyte may not be very innovative, but it's an expertly crafted shoot-'em-up with a timeless quality to it. The fact we still regularly play it is all the proof of its excellence that you need.





Impossible Mission

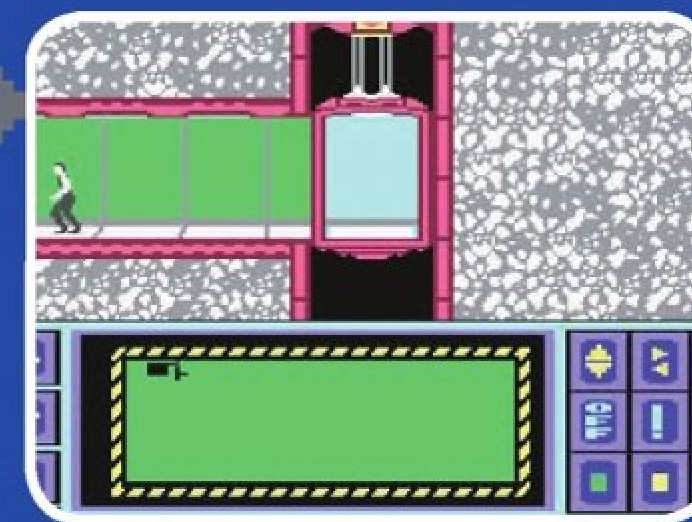
■ **Year:** 1984
■ **Publisher:** Epyx

5

Even today, Elvin Atombender's infamous taunt "Another visitor. Stay a while… Staaaay forever!" sends a tingle of excitement down our spines. Created by Dennis Caswell in 1984, *Impossible Mission* was an atmospheric romp that saw Agent 4125 leaping and somersaulting his way through Elvin's labyrinth-like complex in search of missing password pieces that, when assembled, would allow the agent access to the main control room.

It's not an easy task, though, as the diabolical genius has scattered the pieces all over his lair. Worse still, vicious robots guard many of the lifts and platforms, and Agent 4125 must either athletically leap over them or deactivate them via the many computers found on each screen.

Add in a strict six-hour time limit (with every death knocking ten minutes off the clock) and *Impossible Mission* became a frantic race against time. Numerous ports and sequels followed, but Agent 4125's original adventure remains his best.







Uridium

■ **Year:** 1986
■ **Publisher:** Hewson

4

To many C64 owners, Andrew Braybrook is a god, a coding god, of course, but a god nonetheless. While he occasionally dabbled with other systems, his mastery of the C64's innards was legendary, and he delivered a number of super-slick games that felt just as polished as those you'd seen in arcades.

Uridium scored an astonishing 99 per cent for its graphics when it was reviewed in issue 11 of *Zzap!64*. It's a near-perfect score, but totally understandable when you witness what Andrew was making the C64 pump out. Impossibly fast, silky smooth scrolling combined with gloriously detailed Dreadnoughts and stylish-looking ship sprites to create an awesome game that still impresses today.

It was *Uridium*'s meticulously designed gameplay that most remember, though, with your Manta-class Space Fighter effortlessly gliding over the huge Dreadnoughts and taking down the hordes of opponents that constantly assaulted you. It wasn't just the Dreadnaught's fleet that caused issues, though, as the battleship itself also had to be contended with. Each of the 15 huge ships had various outcroppings on them that couldn't be destroyed, meaning you had to fly around them to avoid losing a life. It's a great mechanic that really heightened the feeling of flying over a huge ship and made for terse bombing runs. Fortunately, your fighter was more than up to the difficult task thanks to being highly manoeuvrable and a joy to control. Take down the Dreadnought's many gun emplacements, land your ship – no easy task in itself – and you'd get to repeat the process against an even tougher adversary.

Even now, some 25 years after its original release, *Uridium* remains a breathtaking shooter to play, with a timeless quality that few other C64 shoot-'em-ups can boast. It's proof to Andrew's skill as both a coder and a game designer that he's the only developer to have two games in your top five.









International Karate +

■ **Year:** 1987

■ **Publisher:** System 3

3 **It's easy to forget the understated genius of Archer Maclean's sequel to the acclaimed *International Karate*. For the uninitiated, all he did was add a third fighter to an already great game – and that's pretty much it. The reality, of course, is that there was far more to Archer's sequel than just that additional fighter, but it's amazing how such a seemingly straightforward idea could help lift it above so many other examples of the genre. In fact, we'll go as far as to say that *IK+* is the best 8-bit fighter, full stop.**

By far the most astonishing aspect of *IK+*'s third pugilist is that we've never seen the mechanic emulated elsewhere with the same dazzling effect. Sure, there are games like *Powerstone 2* that take the idea to its natural three-dimensional conclusion, but from a 2D standpoint? We just can't think of a decent example at all.

One of our favourite aspects of *IK+* is just how expressive and animated the new fighters were. Archer's sequel added stomach kicks, a dangerous head butt, and several other moves to the standard *International* roster, turning combatants into truly dangerous opponents. Archer also included an exceedingly useful backflip (inspired by watching *Grease*) that allowed fighters to get out of trouble if things became too dangerous. The frantic on-screen fisticuffs were backed up by another magnificent score by Rob Hubbard (who had also worked on the original), while even the referee had more to do in Archer's blistering sequel.

Originally assigned to the background, he now pops up during matches to report on the current scores and give encouragement to players. It's a mechanic that works surprisingly well, spurring on the player to greatness, even when he's trailing by a full point. Last, but by no means least, was a new bonus round that saw your player deflecting an increasing number of bouncing balls. As the round continued the speed and trajectory of the balls increased, requiring amazing reflexes to net the best scores.

Despite the sheer amount of action that Archer had packed into his sequel, he still wasn't satisfied, and he began tinkering with *IK+*'s once static backdrop. Fish randomly leapt from the water, spiders would dangle down from overhead beams, gulls would lazily fly across the sky; it all helped *IK+* to not only feel realistic, but also alive.





Wizball

■ **Year:** 1987

■ **Publisher:** Ocean Software Ltd

2 ***Wizball* is one of our favourite ever C64 games, so it's gratifying to see it chart so highly. Part platformer, part shoot-'em-up (with a healthy leaning towards the latter genre), *Wizball* remains a fantastic game that never fails to impress.**

After the evil wizard Zark leeches Wizworld of its vibrant colour, Wiz and his pet cat Nifta attempt to restore the now drab world to its former colourful glory. This involves Wiz jumping in his titular Wizball and moving around the drab, monochromatic world while avoiding hazards and taking down waves of enemies. One of the most delightful aspects of *Wizball* was just how well its mechanics worked. Initially, you can only bounce around, which more often that not can get you into all sorts of trouble. As you shoot down waves of enemies they will leave pearls behind, which in turn light up seven distinctive power-ups. A quick waggle of your joystick will select said power-up which can range from more powerful firepower, to thrust, and anti-grav: which gives you far better control over your spherical craft. Last, but by no means least, is the Catalyte, which enables you to switch control to Wiz's cat Nifta, so you can mop up droplets of colour as they fall to the floor.

It's a delightful system, fully controlled by the joystick, which easily captures the arcade experiences that were so popular at the time. It's also beautifully balanced, requiring you to switch between shooting and collecting in order to get through the eight large game worlds. Highly original – few other games have even tried recreating its magic formulae – it's a game that would work brilliantly on today's popular handhelds. For some, *Wizball* is a hardcore shooter, while others prefer its puzzle and co-op elements. Regardless of the type of game you think *Wizball* is, there's no denying that there's nothing else on Commodore's machine which is quite like it.









Paradroid





■ **Year:** 1985
■ **Publisher:** Hewson

1

Andrew Braybrook's *Paradroid* is a masterpiece, there's no other way to describe its sheer brilliance. Like *Wizball*, *The Sentinel* and many other games in this list, it's based upon the simplest of ideas, but Braybrook managed to make everything about it feel so much more epic. As with *Wizball*, at first *Paradroid* appears to be nothing more than another simple-looking shoot-'em-up. Look deeper, though, and you'll discover that it's so much more than that, offering a healthy blend of different genres that not only manage to keep the gameplay fresh and exciting, but most importantly, keep you going back for more.

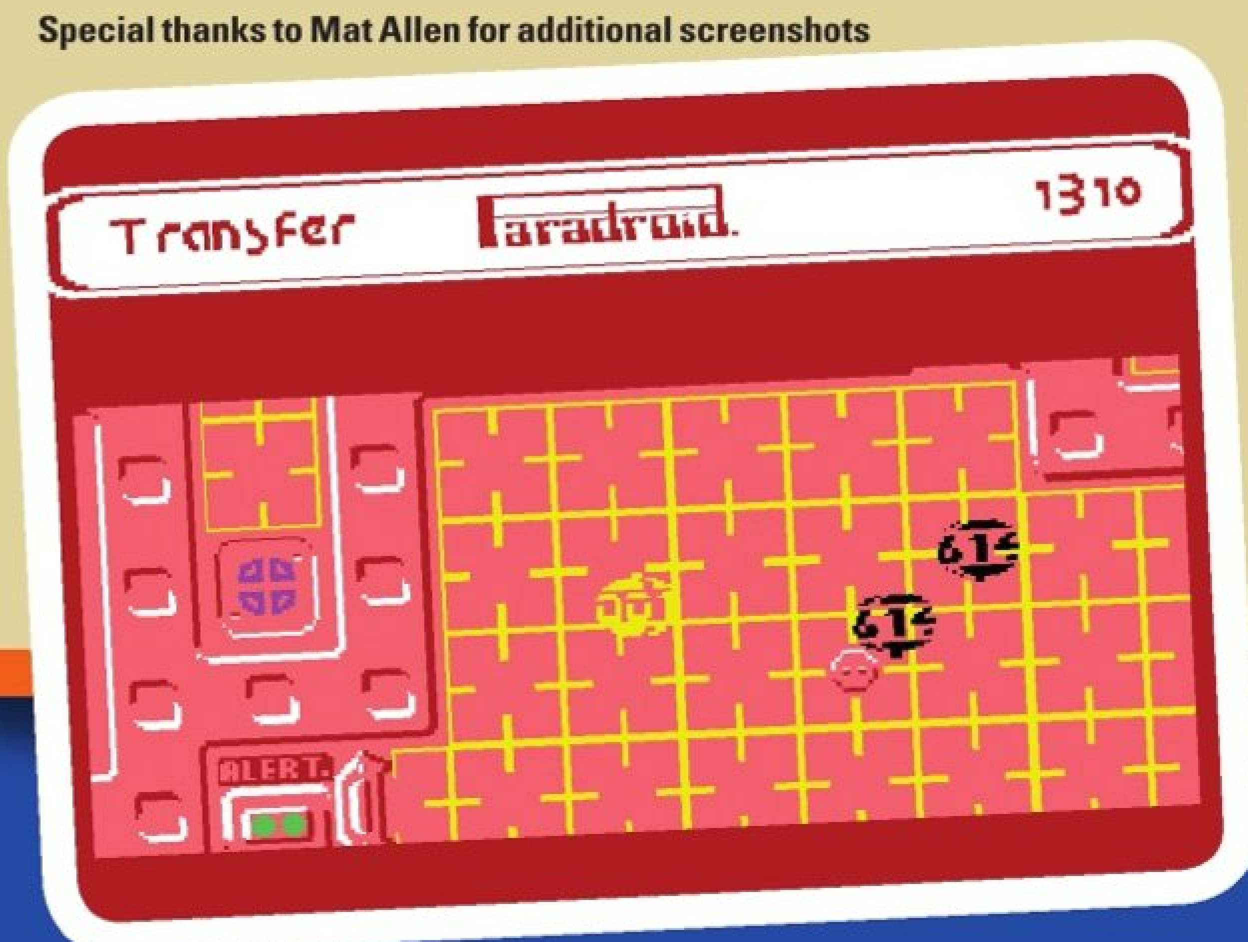
This is partly down to Braybrook's exceptional skill as a coder. As with *Uridium*, *Paradroid*'s coding is faultless, delivering impossibly slick scrolling and brightly designed play-fields that allow you to become totally immersed in the on-screen action, and prove to your non-C64-owning friends that they had backed the wrong horse. There are no niggles in *Paradroid*, no annoying little bugs to distract you from its absorbing gameplay; just a coherent, well put together world that draws you in to its murky depths and refuses to let you go. Andrew was a fervent arcade player back in the day – he still owns the original coin-op of *Rainbow Islands* – so it's no surprise to learn that both *Uridium* and *Paradroid* have the sort of slick presentation that was abundant in the popular arcade games of the time. In short, *Paradroid* is the arcade game you never got to play. Play it you will, though, because from the moment *Paradroid* sinks its claws into you, it refuses to let go.

Paradroid is set on a huge multi-tiered spaceship that is overrun with hostile droids. The player takes control of a unique droid called the Influence Device, and has the task of destroying all the other droids found on the spaceship's 20 decks. All the other droids are far more powerful than your little Influence Device, as noted by the up to three digit numbers found on their sides. In comparison, the Influence Device has a rating of just 001, meaning it can easily be taken out by virtually every other droid.

Fortunately, while the Influence Device isn't too hot in a gunfight, it does have the handy ability to take over another droid by 'linking' to them. Once 'linked' to a droid – of which there are 23 distinctive types – the Influence Device earns all the skills and firepower of the droid in question, making its task far easier to complete. It's worth noting, though, that you can only control a droid for a limited amount of time, so *Paradroid* requires you to play aggressively, constantly hunting down weaker droids with your weaponry of using your 'link' powers to control stronger opponents. Even the linking isn't easy, though, as you need to complete a surprisingly complex mini-game first, which gets harder and harder as the droids get stronger and stronger. It's also worth nothing that linking to stronger droids isn't without its risks. Fail to successfully 'link' and your host droid will be immediately destroyed. Fine if you're already in another droid, but not so good if you're the Influence Device, as it immediately results in the game's end. As a result, *Paradroid* features a great risk and reward system where you have to gauge the best way to dispose of each droid that you encounter.

Highly influential, its possessing mechanic has featured in everything from *Space Station Silicon Valley* to *Messiah* and *Mind Jack*. *Paradroid*, for us, is the zenith of C64 gaming, and is a title that every gamer, C64 owner or otherwise, needs to play.

Special thanks to Mat Allen for additional screenshots







Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come







INFO

- **Featured System:** Xbox
- **Year Released:** 2002
- **Publisher:** Sega
- **Developer:** Smilebit
- **Key People:** Akihiko Mukaiyama (director) Takashi Iwade (artist) Saori Kobayashi (writer)

GO DEEPER

- ***Panzer Dragoon Orta* is the only game in the series not developed by Team Andromeda.**
- **Although backwards compatible on the Xbox 360, most PAL versions crash after the third episode.**

16. PANZER DRAGOON ORTA

Panzer Dragoon Orta was one of Sega's biggest ever gambles. Darran Jones explains why it remains a superb Xbox game, and one that should be added to your collection

THE BACKGROUND

Even now, we're still amazed that *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, Sega's fourth (console) game in the series, and so far, the final entry, actually got a release date, let alone released. It's easy to forget that when *Panzer Dragoon Orta* was first announced at the Tokyo Games Show in 2001, Sega and the franchise itself were seen as mere shadows of their former selves.

After dropping out of the console war due to the disappointing sales of its Dreamcast, Sega appeared to be backing the wrong console when it revealed that *Panzer Dragoon Orta* would be an exclusive release for Microsoft's incoming (and then completely unproven) Xbox, and that it wouldn't be making an appearance on either Sony's PlayStation 2 or Nintendo's GameCube. And let's not forget that Team Andromeda, the development studio at Sega that had steered the revered franchise through three fantastic Saturn games, had disbanded three years previously. It appeared that *Panzer Dragoon Orta* would be dead in the water before work had even begun on it. Fast forward to 2003 (it hit Japan in December 2002) and Sega's new game was garnering extremely positive reviews, with numerous magazines and websites lavishing heaps of praise on the on-rails shooter. Sega's famed franchise was back with a bang and those new to the series were beginning to understand why it was held in such high regard. What a pity then that critical acclaim doesn't always lead to commercial success…

THE GAME

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of *Panzer Dragoon Orta* was that Smilebit decided to not continue the RPG theme that had worked so well for Team Andromeda in the excellent and final Saturn release, *Panzer Dragoon Saga*. It instead decided to go back to the winning formulae that had worked so well for the first two games in the popular series. Gameplay-wise, *Orta* was extremely similar to the original *Panzer Dragoon*s, with only a few additional, yet significant touches here and there. The

Special thanks to Al for his Xbox help with this article. Check out his collection at http://cantstopcollecting.blogspot.com/

Things of note



Limited dragoons

To celebrate the release of *Panzer Dragoon Orta* in Japan, Sega Direct sold a gorgeous white Xbox. Only 999 units were printed and it's now extremely hard to get hold of.



Beautiful art

The Moebius-inspired artwork has always been a highlight and *Panzer Dragoon Orta* was no different. It boasted stunning surreal designs that gave it a timeless quality.



Still surreal

To tie in with its surrealistic imagery, *Panzer Dragoon Orta* has a story that's just as nonsensical and impenetrable as past games. It sure looks nice, though.



Retro heaven

Not content with delivering a truly stunning game, Smilebit also included the original *Panzer Dragoon* as well. It may have been the inferior PC port, but it was still great value.

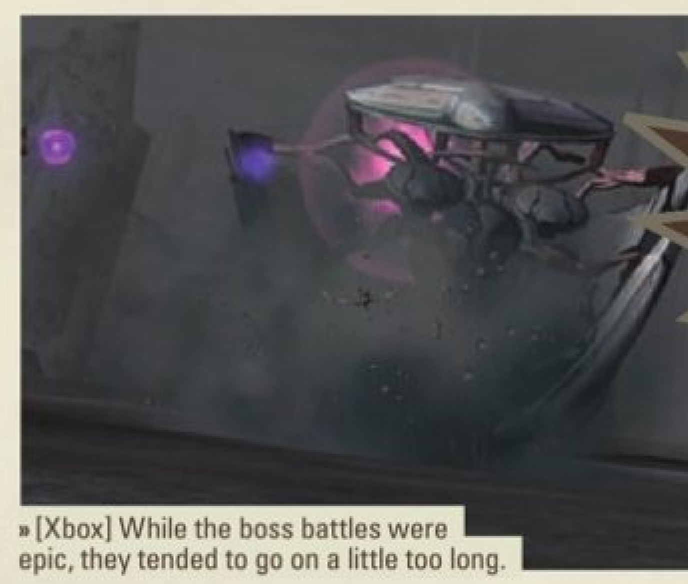


Return of the dragon?

We're dreadfully excited about Kinect's *Project Draco*. Comprising of many ex-members of past *Dragoon* games, it's looking almost identical to the classic franchise.



» [Xbox] Your Heavy Wing dragon has some devastating lasers that rip through enemies like a hot knife through butter.



» [Xbox] While the boss battles were epic, they tended to go on a little too long.



What the press thought



gamesTM
Score: 9/10
"After a break of more than four years, Smilebit has re-introduced Sega's enduring series in style."

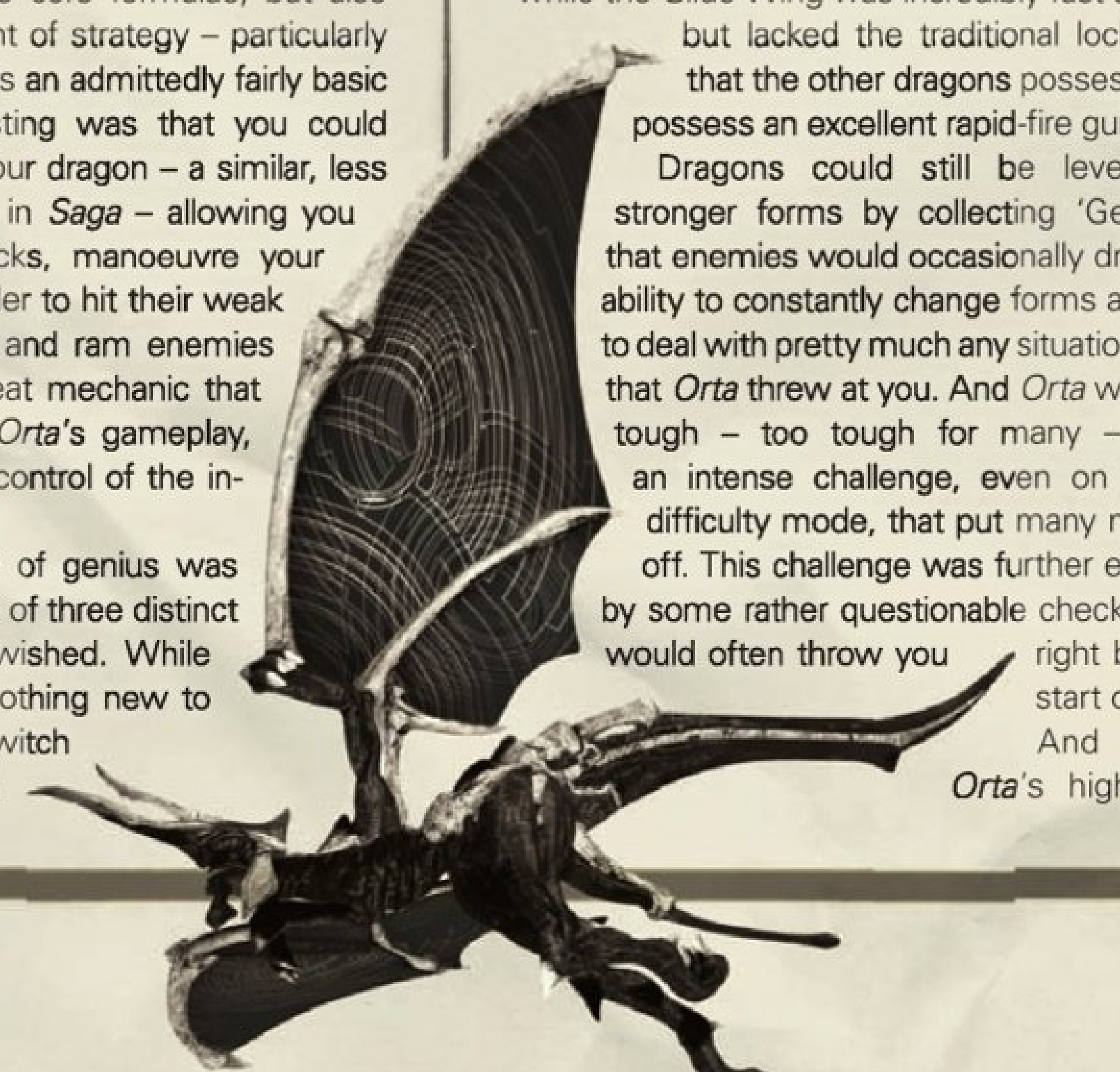


IGN
Score: 92%
"Addictive, fun, and fantastic, this one is a true demonstration of the power of Xbox."

action remained on-rails, you could still rotate around your dragon with a simple click of a button, and the berserk attack and branching routes that had worked so well in *Panzer Dragoon II Zwei* also returned.

Smilebit introduced a number of interesting elements to the standard gameplay mechanics that not only improved on the core formulae, but also added a surprising amount of strategy – particularly in boss battles – to what is an admittedly fairly basic game. The most interesting was that you could now alter the speed of your dragon – a similar, less tactile system was used in *Saga* – allowing you to dodge incoming attacks, manoeuvre your way around bosses in order to hit their weak spots or even speed up and ram enemies for damage. It was a great mechanic that added immeasurably to *Orta*'s gameplay, and let you feel more in control of the in-game proceedings.

Smilebit's other stroke of genius was to let you change into one of three distinct dragons whenever you wished. While morphing dragons was nothing new to the series, *Orta* let you switch between three distinct dragon forms on the fly, further adding to the options that were available to you when fighting. Base Wing was your general all-purpose dragon with decent manoeuvrability and firepower; Heavy Wing was a behemoth that was low on manoeuvrability, but packed a mighty punch due to its powerful lasers; while the Glide Wing was incredibly fast and nimble, but lacked the traditional lock-on lasers that the other dragons possessed – it did possess an excellent rapid-fire gun, though.



Dragons could still be levelled-up to stronger forms by collecting 'Gene Bases' that enemies would occasionally drop, but the ability to constantly change forms allowed you to deal with pretty much any situation or enemy that *Orta* threw at you. And *Orta* was insanely tough – too tough for many – delivering an intense challenge, even on its normal difficulty mode, that put many newcomers off. This challenge was further exacerbated by some rather questionable checkpoints that would often throw you right back to the start of a level.

And yet even *Orta*'s high difficulty couldn't hide the fact that it was a wonderful game, offering stunning visuals – which still look impressive today – magnificent design and a stunning soundtrack that continually took the breath away. Add in some interesting bonuses, including the PC version of the original *Panzer Dragoon* included on disc, and Sega's faith in Smilebit and, indeed, Microsoft's Xbox, proved well placed indeed.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Nine years after its original Japanese Xbox release and *Panzer Dragoon Orta* still feels like a truly special videogame; a game that really deserves all the lavish praise that was heaped upon it. Brilliantly designed and with some truly stunning set-pieces and visuals – witness the amazing fleet you attack on the fourth episode, or the stark beauty of the Eternal Glacies as you race through them – it still has the power to amaze. Yes, it's a simple game, and yes, it does little to improve on what came before it, but it does it all so well. It's also arguably one of the best examples of the Sega of old (who simply made games it wanted, regardless of the potential risks involved) and proves that it is possible to subtly improve an existing winning formulae and turn it into something better.

Kid Chameleon

What is a chameleon's motto? A change is as good as a rest. And when it comes to changing, few do so quite as often as Kid Chameleon. Kim Wild finds out how tricky it is handling someone with multiple abilities…

It was the early Nineties. Sega was at the peak of its popularity, having released *Sonic The Hedgehog*, and was currently in the process of developing more titles. Mark Cerny was heading up a new splinter group within Sega called the Sega Technical Institute, which started development on *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and a new project called *Kid Chameleon*.

"*Kid Chameleon* had just started before I got there," explains Steve Woita, responsible for much of the programming, game and boss design. "A programmer left and Mark then hired me. I took it over with Mark, and we all just got together and figured out who should do what." Development for the game was actually done on the Amiga, and this was something that took getting used to. "Everywhere else and all other stuff was done on PCs, so when we got to Sega it was, 'What's this Amiga business?' We had to get used to the idiosyncrasies of the Amiga and how that all worked and proprietary tools, and we would work hand-in-hand with one of the designers on what I wanted."



Kid Chameleon – a title derived from the lead character's ability to change appearance and abilities – sees young lad Casey enter a virtual reality arcade game called *WildSide* to rescue a bunch of children who have been enslaved by the monsters within. He does this with the use of different helmets that he encounters throughout the game. These included Iron Knight, which can take extra damage; Berzerker and its charging ability; samurai form Red Stealth; Skycutter and its tornado; the *Friday The 13th*-inspired Maniaxe; and one of Steve's favourites: Micromax, a fly that can stick to walls, among



IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **» DEVELOPER:** SEGA TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
- **» RELEASED:** 1992
- **» PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **» GENRE:** PLATFORM





» [Mega Drive] "I wanted to make sure that we had a diverse array of helmets."



» [Mega Drive] This is what happens when Darran doesn't get his coffee in the morning.

others. Testing these abilities took considerable time.

"Because he had so many helmets, a lot of testing was making sure, depending on what helmet he had, that going into a round didn't break it. It was like testing eight different characters with different attributes." The inclusion of teleporters throughout the game enabled Casey to travel to different levels and sometimes took the player down a different route.

The vast number of blocks, either as platforms or to smash, was a big job that Steve was solely responsible for. "I programmed all the block stuff – when you hit a block and the shards fly off, how the blocks moved, and how far you can jump from a rubber block. You had to nail it down as soon as possible. Most of them were visual effects, but some caused displacement on where the character would be so had to be done as soon as possible so the round could be laid, and relaid later because I changed some values on how rubber blocks worked or whatever. It was ongoing testing on the game, but we liked playing it and we had a good test department who would report stuff back to us. We were always trying to keep the game running at the fastest frame rate possible, and there were times when I had to make sure I clipped it just right so it didn't keep getting processed. Hit one block, shards are flying; hit another block, another set of shards are flying while the old set are still there. I had to make sure they stepped over the old shards and not right along the screen. I had to reuse a handful of shards, but if I used them too early it would look crazy in the middle of the screen, so because the game scrolled, there was a lot of mixing and pasting here and there."

One of the main points that players of the game make is just how long it is. At 103 levels, *Kid Chameleon* wouldn't be finished in a hurry. "We didn't include a save feature back then – my call on it – as at the time saving in a game required a battery inside the cartridge," explains Steve. "We tried to structure it so you don't have to put a battery in, but the game became so big and long that it needed some sort of saving mechanism. It was kind of funny hearing stories of people leaving the game on for three days in a row." When questioned about whether implementing a save system would have been a good idea, Steve isn't convinced. "I thought you had to do it in one session because I'm

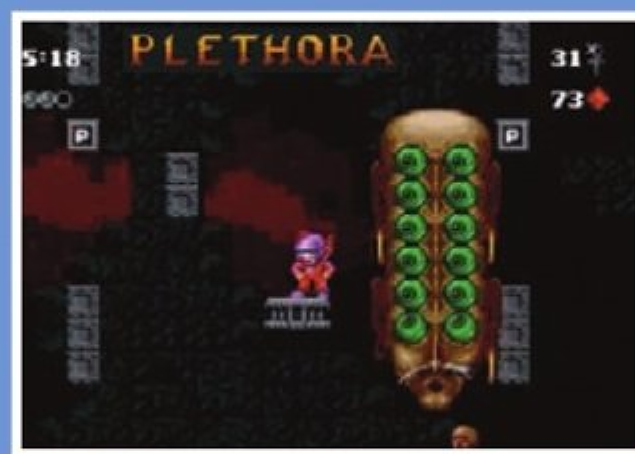
"I wanted to put more bosses in. I was really more into the boss side of things"

BOSS RUSH

STILL DETERMINED TO construct a boss-only game, Steve Woita, Jason Plumb and Tom Payne came up with the concept of *Spinny & Spike*, involving two main characters who would fight a series of enemies, taking place across various nightmares. Although approved by Sega CEO Tom Kalinske, the trio were reassigned partway through development to help work on *Sonic Spinball*, which was being prepared for a Christmas release. Sadly, upon their return to their original project, Steve discovered that "new people were working on *Spinny & Spike* and were taking it in a different direction, so I then left and went to Ocean". Despite putting a new team in place to finish the game, including a producer and lead artist, the unique style of the game and the esoteric code that was being created by Steve and team meant it was impossible to complete without a rewrite, leading to the project being canned.







» [Mega Drive] Final boss Plethora was inadvertently pointed to with a cheat code.

COMICAL

KID CHAMELEON MAY never have received a sequel, but he did achieve a cult following by featuring in a strip for *Sonic The Comic*, printed solely in the UK. It was published in 1993 and ran from issues 7-12, closely following the game's concept of having to enter the *WildSide* arcade game, with Casey going in to rescue his friend Suzy, guided by the mysterious 'Voice'. Each strip saw Kid Chameleon transform into one of his special forms, before defeating the final enemy as himself. *Kid Chameleon* would make a reappearance in another strip throughout issues 54-59, this time to free school bully Brad and other children that had become imprisoned by the Voice, who had now become quite sinister. The ending of this comic strip was left open, leading to speculation at the time that another series was planned, although this failed to materialise, despite the comic actively asking readers to write in to show their interest. We can only speculate over what would have featured, but we suspect that the true identity of the Voice would have been revealed.



more of a purist that way. If you come back, it's like listening to half a song. I had a certain mindset of how I wanted the experience to be."

Despite being so large, very little of this was planned from the outset, proving to be more of an organic process. Although there was a character bible by Broderick Macaraeg that kept the overall design under control, much of the creation was flexible and developed as it went along.

"On my end I would have an idea for a boss. The [Shishkaboss] was the first one I did – the three-headed guy with an arrow through it – and basically I drew it on a piece of paper with three circles and an arrow through it, put some eyes on it, and went over to an artist and said: 'This is what I want. It's a boss with three heads; you have to jump on it three times and then the eye will pop out of the first one and then the second and then the third, and it all breaks up.' He just took it from there and came up with this cool-looking head model in 2D, and he had an earring kind of like Mr T. That was the way I would work: come up with an idea, go over with a sketch, get the final art, and in a day or so tune it up and boom! You had the energy for the idea, and it didn't take long before you saw it on screen."

Even a subtle idea, like reflections in the water, got added. "Where we lived in northern California there's a freeway called 280 and a reservoir called Crystal Springs," remembers Steve. "When I was driving to work, I noticed the way the trees reflect in the water – we weren't doing that in the game. I spoke to an artist and said: 'When I'm driving past Crystal Springs I notice the reflection and the hills are similar to those in *Kid Chameleon*. Can we reflect off the water?' So she and another programmer, Bill Willis, got that to happen on the scrolling stuff."

> **"I first met Yuji Naka at a pizza joint, and he was following us, not sure where to go"**

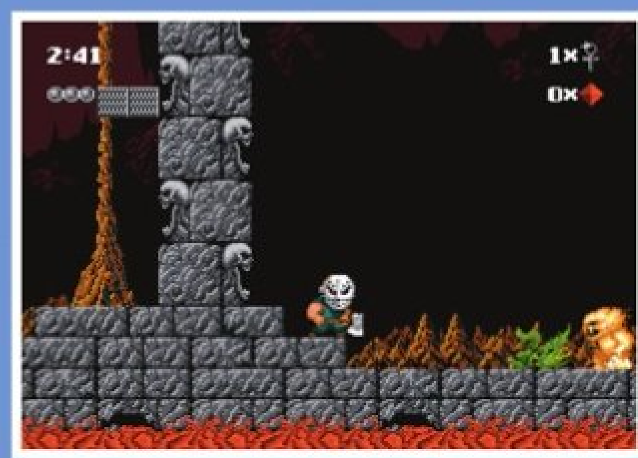
As Steve had a passion for bosses, he came up with the design for quite a few of them. "A level was in a city and I was thinking of New York, and they had really good bagels back then. I reused the heads from [Shishkaboss] and renamed them the Bagel Brothers or something similar." The ending boss was also a Woita creation, and a cheat code inadvertently pointed to this: "Nobody got credited for stuff, and in Japanese games credits only happen at the end, and that was how it was going to happen with *Kid Chameleon*. So we said, 'Let's make it so you can cheat to go to the last level,' which was the ending with the credits. So we got that to work and we were getting ready to wrap the game up when one of the other designers added another level to the game. It actually pushed everything out, so the cheat code now pointed to my boss level just before the credits, and it looked like I was making it point at a level I worked on. When it came out in a magazine, Mark Cerny asked, 'Do you know anything about being able to cheat to get to your round here?' and I'm like, 'No.' We didn't plan it that way; we didn't check to make sure, and I should have done that with four or five other

level designers out there, but as it was pointing to the wrong screen, I looked like the bad guy."

The ending itself has a personal connection to Steve. "You had my name under Kid Chameleon but you didn't see his face, and I asked: 'Why did you put me in as Kid Chameleon?' Rick said, 'You look more like him,' but I'm like, 'Where's my face?' and he replied, 'I don't really know how to characterise you,' and I'm like, 'What does that even mean?' So at the end of the game you just see the back of Kid. It was kind of funny."

One of Steve's most memorable moments at Sega involved meeting Yuji Naka. "I first met Naka at a pizza joint, and he was following us, not sure where to go. His English was pretty good and we were just talking over pizza, and he was a really nice guy. I remember [Sega Technical Institute], at a 9am meeting in the office, Naka was standing around the table and we would have to tell **a story for a couple of minutes as a great way to get to know everyone. Never seen this before or after in any other company."**

Although developed by a small team, *Kid Chameleon* was a game that was received well by players, while Sega itself seemed more than happy with the finished product. "They produced a commercial before



» [Mega Drive] Even axe murderers have to take a break to save some children occasionally.

Christmas," says Steve, "and we saw the commercial on TV and were like, 'Wow, something we worked on is actually on TV.' They must have had some faith, as it cost a lot of money for ads back then, and there was lots of magazine press."

Sadly, although the team wanted to work on a sequel, it didn't happen. "We were all ready to put all these new ideas into the next version that we weren't able to get into the first one," remembers Steve. "I wanted to put more bosses in. I was really more into the boss side of things **rather than just having loads of levels that scroll. I liked to focus on a small kind of world where you had to figure out how to beat this creature. But they didn't want to do a sequel, so we didn't do it."**

After working on *Sonic 2*, Steve started development on *Spinny & Spike* (see 'Boss Rush'), before leaving Sega to

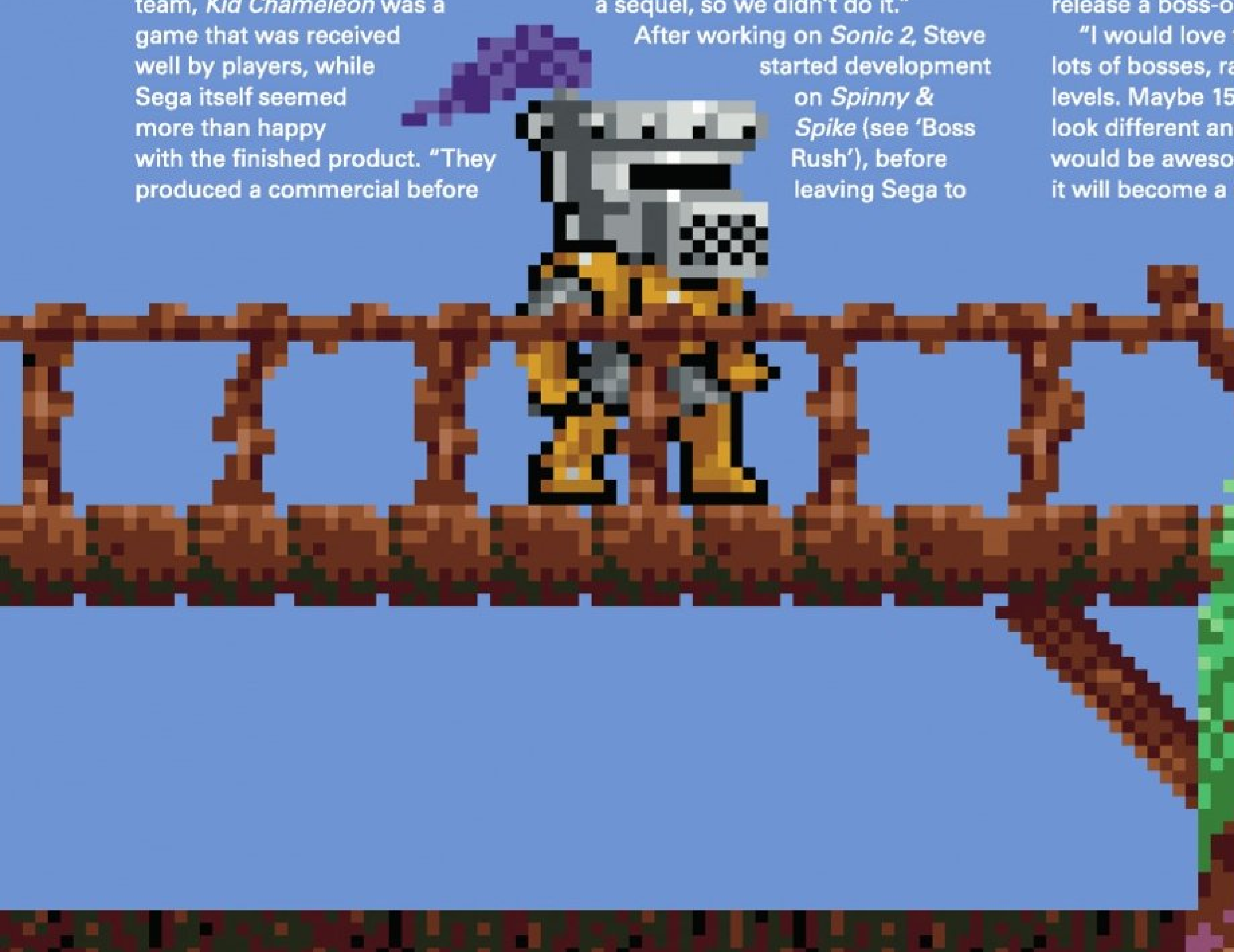


» [Mega Drive] "People have asked me for level editors and stuff, but there isn't the time to do that," says Steve.

work for Ocean, where he designed *Waterworld* on the Virtual Boy and an unreleased version for the Saturn, which he has fond memories of and still wishes had been released. These **days, he dabbles in the world of Flash and downloadable web games, including an addictive series called *DunkIt* (www.tinygames.com). Yet even today, Steve is itching to release a boss-only game.**

"I would love to do a game with lots of bosses, rather than just lots of levels. Maybe 15 or 20 bosses that all look different and play uniquely. That would be awesome." Maybe one day it will become a reality.







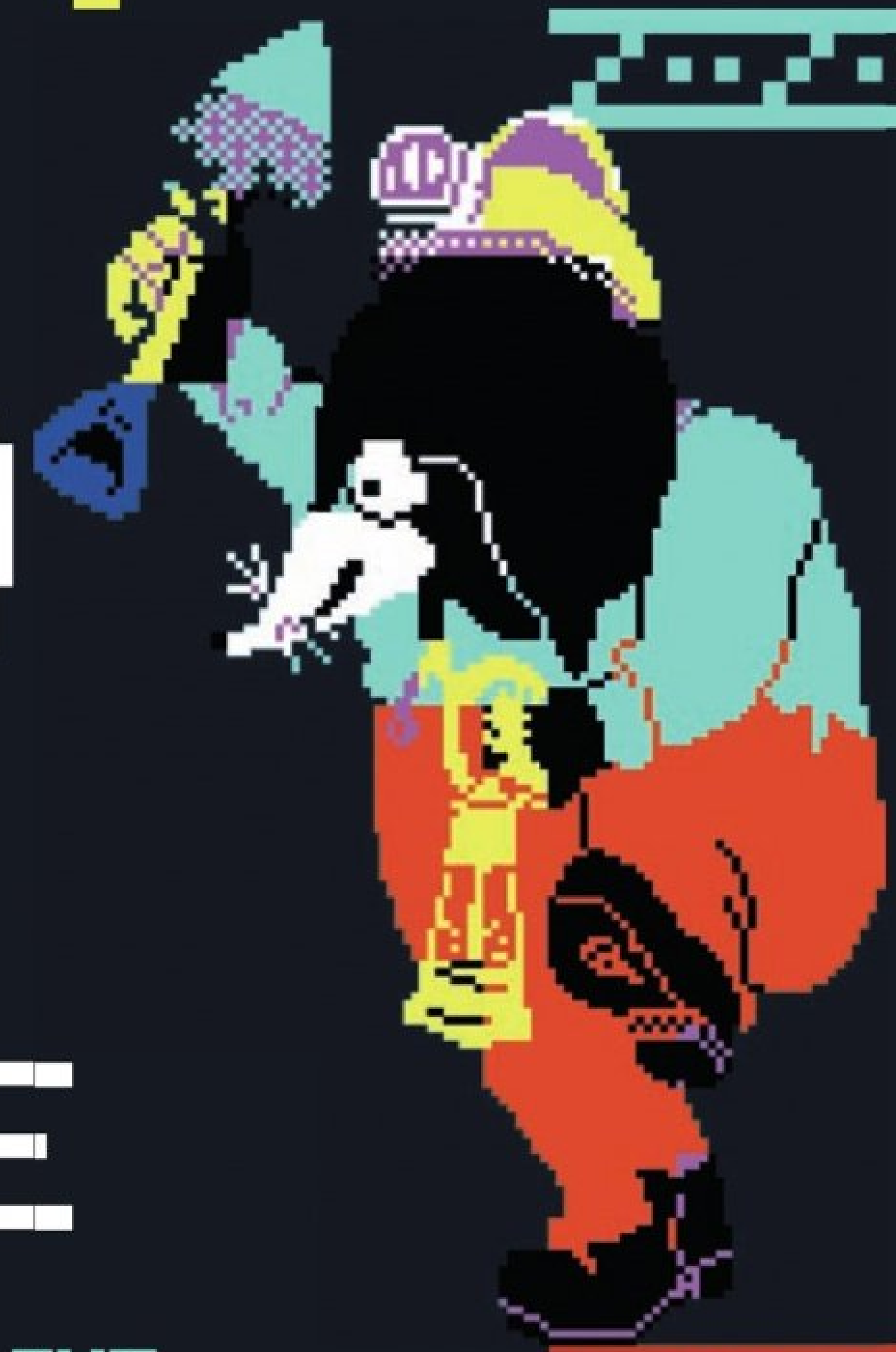
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1992

SONIC SPINBALL (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1993

WATERWORLD
SYSTEM: VIRTUAL BOY
YEAR: 1995

HOLY MOLY: THE STORY OF Monty MOLE



CRAIG GRANNELL CHARTS THE PROGRESS OF EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE VIDEOGAME MOLE, FROM COAL THIEF TO SUPERHERO, WITH THE HELP OF CO-CREATORS PETE HARRAP AND TONY CROWTHER, EX-COMMODORE CODER JASON PERKINS, AND SID CHIP VIRTUOSO ROB HUBBARD

Ian Stewart, managing director at Gremlin Graphics, was once into double letters for initials, remembers Tony Crowther: "There had been *Potty Pigeon* in 1984, and then he came up with the name Monty Mole and asked me to write a game using the character." At the time, Tony was fixated on creating scrolling games on the C64, such as *Son Of Blagger*, and he thought he could do something better with the knowledge he'd since gained.

Through experimentation, Tony got a larger and faster scrolling platform game working: "Getting the tech right was a big challenge, but I had a crude sprite running around the map, and integrated a randomly generated maze, which at the time I was fascinated with." Once the *Monty Mole* name was decided, the game was moulded to suit. Tony recalls that with the game being designed on a big map, anything that didn't fit was dispensed with, and he aimed to include as much variety as he could. "I did have issues with the maximum number of sprites, with only eight allowed on the same line," he adds. "So the design worked around the number of available sprites, and also motion: I wanted to make as many moving parts as possible, with conveyer belts and crushers."

In a curious case of parallel development, Tony's game wasn't the only one in the works. Pete Harrap was given the same loose brief, but his target platform was the ZX Spectrum. With the Speccy lacking the hardware tricks necessary for full-screen scrolling, Pete unsurprisingly came up with something very different, inspired by *Manic Miner*. "That was the type of game I enjoyed back then – a mix of humour, simplicity and 'how do I get up there before I run out of time?' puzzles," he says.

DOWN THE PIT

In Pete's hands, Monty's Spectrum debut also took on a political bent. Pete placed Monty in a coal mine, making a daring raid to grab enough fuel to see himself through a long, cold winter. This was played out against a backdrop of

IN THE KNOW

PUBLISHER: Gremlin Graphics
DEVELOPER: Gremlin Graphics/ Core Design (*Impossamole*)
PLATFORM: Various
RELEASED: 1984–1990
GENRE: Platform
EXPECT TO PAY: £1+ per game

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THING ON A SPRING
1985 | C64, Amstrad

JACK THE NIPPER (pictured)
1986 | Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, MSX

LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE
1990 | Amiga, Atari ST, Spectrum, C64, Amstrad



real-world industrial action in the UK, with coal miners striking, urged on by National Union of Mineworkers leader Arthur Scargill, who makes a brief appearance in the game, in caricature form. These elements rewarded Pete's game with a television appearance and led to promises by Gremlin to make a donation to a miners' charity.

"The miners' strike angle was because my dad was a coal-face worker, annoyed that he never got a vote on the strike," explains Pete. "Miners used to be very democratic, and it wasn't fair for my dad to be made to strike to satisfy the ambitions of Scargill, no matter how right he was about mine closures. He treated the miners as though they were stupid and couldn't decide for themselves."

This being the Eighties, Pete didn't create a typical mine for Monty to explore. Although it included a trip on a mine cart, dangerous falling debris and, of course, coal, it was also populated by all manner of surreal and dangerous foes, including demons and leaping sharks. "The visuals were fun, based on items that could be used in a mine, scare you, or make you laugh," he says. "My favourite was the dripping candle, although you wouldn't get a naked flame in a real mine!" It was also decided that the Spectrum version should be a flick-screen adventure rather than aping *Manic Miner*'s single-screen approach, to "allow the player more choice on where to go next". Having started with what later became the game's second screen, a mine entrance, Pete worked up maps and figured out how they linked together, which determined the types of platforms that were required. The game was very rapidly put together, taking about three months in all.

» [C16] Mini *Monty On the Run*, on the C16. It's actually surprisingly good.



» [Spectrum] Helpful tip: don't fall down a mountain and get eaten by a yeti!



VICIOUS STREAK

Although Tony and Pete mostly worked in isolation – Tony recalls that his game was pretty much done by the time the Spectrum version was started, but Pete says the first he knew about the C64 version was when his game was almost finished – there was still time before shipping to swap a few ideas.

According to Pete, a couple of changes were demanded by Ian, who considered the Spectrum version to be "lacking a little oomph". Pete duly pilfered Tony's coal-crushers and added them to his game, then made them more vicious: "I was the one who made their movement in the Spectrum version random… guilty!"

Since Pete had decided on the game's hero stealing coal, that component was added to Tony's game. Additionally, Ian felt both games needed some kind of opening screen, and so Pete devised a scene where Monty sneaks up to a miner's house and grabs his coal bucket, before making a break for the mine, pursued by an angry miner and dodging massive acorns dropped by a crazed squirrel. A variant was added to the C64 version, but Pete took the added step of making all the coal in the Spectrum game invisible if you didn't first collect the bucket. "I guess I'm a bit cruel," he laughs. "But I felt it was obvious. How can you collect coal without a bucket?"

With *Wanted: Monty Mole* complete, Pete was satisfied, and while he'd have liked more screens and sprites – he explains that he never found a suitable spot for a digital version of his head – no grand plans were cut. "In hindsight, I'd give you a bit of warning on the crushers and clues about what might kill you – I was too cruel sometimes," he muses. "But I remember standing in WHSmith, looking at my hard work on a shelf, when a nine-year-old walked up and said, 'I want that one,' which was a proud moment." And on the varying versions that ended up being produced? "Tony's game was excellent, making full use of the C64's hardware, and, if I'm honest, it worked better than mine

MONTY IS INNOCENT

THE SECOND GAME in the *Monty Mole* series might have the furry felon adorning the cover art and title screen, but he was barely in the game itself. Instead, the hero of the hour was Sam Stoat, determined to free his chum from the bowels of Scudmore Prison. Designed by Chris Kerry, the title dispenses with *Wanted: Monty Mole*'s platforms. Instead, action is presented as a complex isometric 3D maze. In theory, the aim is to grab a key from the governor's office, to open one of the cell doors in another part of the complex; do this several times and you'll finally locate Monty. In reality, much of the game involves avoiding myriad beasties that kill Sam with the slightest touch, and getting hugely frustrated with the insane difficulty of springing Monty.

Reviews were mixed, and Pete notes that he had no involvement in its creation: "I only saw it after completion and didn't like it at all. To me, Monty is always a platformer." Gamers agreed; poor sales were largely what led to Pete being asked to work on a proper sequel to his original hit, the series high point that was *Monty On The Run*.



» [Spectrum] *Monty Is Innocent*? Perhaps. But the game's guilty of being a bit rubbish.

would have if directly ported. But mine was best. I'm biased!"

GOING IT ALONE

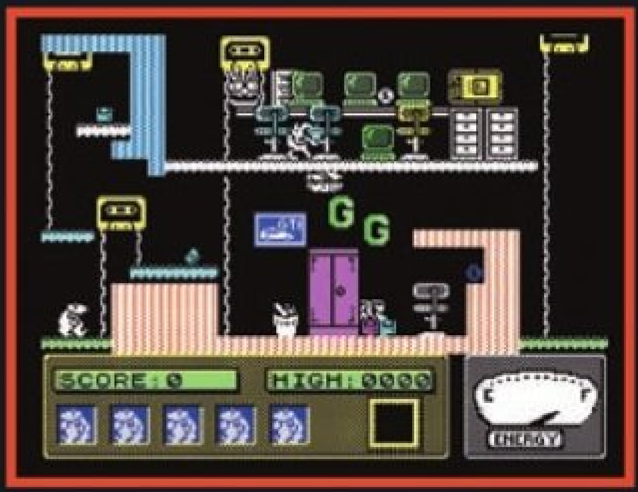
With a second game starring Monty having failed to trouble the charts (see '*Monty Is Innocent*'), Pete was asked to design a sequel more in keeping with his original. "Since he'd escaped prison, Monty was on the run," he says of the basic concept and name of the follow-up, *Monty On The Run*. But while Pete was keen to retain the style of *Wanted*, he was adamant that it shouldn't just be the same game with more screens. "I'd been disappointed with *Jet Set Willy* on that score," he says. "It lost a lot of detail when compared to *Manic Miner*, presumably to make the extra screens fit. I thought *Manic Miner* was the better game – more creative and fun."

With a mantra that adding screens at the cost of creativity was the wrong direction, Pete let his imagination drive *Monty On The Run*'s development. The map, while still broadly linear, offered more scope for exploration. New features were added, including teleporters, a somersaulting Monty, and lifts – one of which abruptly crashes, crushing the hero. Additionally, although most of the game remained a traditional platformer, two sections were very different: one found Monty piloting a jetpack; the other had him driving a C5. "The somersault was because I liked *Impossible Mission* on the C64 and wondered how it would look if I borrowed that for *Monty*," admits Pete. But other new map-oriented features were to force gamers to explore: "The 'porters are there because I'm a Trekkie, but I also wanted to create short cuts around the map, and areas you could only get into one way and then have to escape from. As for the broken lift, the first one was to discourage you from taking a perfectly good short cut later on. Did I mention I was cruel?"

Pete remembers when Ian bought a C5, explaining its presence: "I thought: 'Nice, a washing machine with wheels – I can use that!' I wanted to make it do wheelies, but couldn't fit the animations in, so I was stuck with it jumping." The jetpack, meanwhile, was a tribute to Ultimate. "Plus I thought strapping a jetpack to a mole would give you a fun new control method to get used to right in the middle of the game."

Monty On The Run sometimes frustrated – there were abrupt deaths and a pre-game 'Freedom Kit' that made areas impassable if you'd selected the wrong item. "I loved throwing spanners back then," chuckles Pete, noting that kit items were specifically chosen to appear useful. But the game was nonetheless far more playable and balanced than *Wanted*. "It's my favourite, because I feel I got almost everything right," affirms Pete. "It played exactly how I wanted, with just the right amount of humour."

> **"The broken lift discouraged you from taking a short cut later on. Did I mention I was cruel?"**





CONVERSION CAPERS

This time, instead of a wildly different C64 version, it largely matched the Spectrum's, which Pete recalls was down to fan demands and sales figures: "The C64 game didn't do as well as the Spectrum release, so Ian decided to make the games more similar."

Also, Tony had left Gremlin, leaving Pete entirely in control of the game's direction, which was defined by the Spectrum's capabilities. Even so, the games didn't turn out identical, due to the C64's masterful Rob Hubbard soundtrack (see 'Number-one score') and some graphical additions, which Pete says were

MOLEY CHRISTMAS

THE LAST CLASSIC *Monty Mole* game appeared as a Christmas gift for readers of *Your Sinclair*. Issue 25's covermount was the exclusive *Moley Christmas*, boasting six single-screen locations into which the essence of *Monty On The Run* had been distilled. The game had an ever-decreasing energy meter, so demanded fast reactions and quick thinking to solve puzzles and progress through the Gremlin Graphics HQ, mastering and duplication plants, the M1, and the offices of *Your Sinclair*. The final location finds Monty delivering the mag to a newsagent while braving traffic on a busy road – a cute riff on *Frogger*.

"We did the game as a favour to Ian and kept it quite simple, because it was to be given away on a mag," recalls Pete. "But we certainly still wanted to give value to the *Monty Mole* concept. The limited amount of time we had to develop the game was what led to more having to be done per screen. But that also meant we got more time to spend tweaking each location, even though the total development time was much less than for previous *Monty Mole* titles."



» [Spectrum] Monty attempts to thumb a lift on the M1 in *Moley Christmas*.



» [Spectrum] Why Monty can't settle on this sunny island at the start of *Auf Wiedersehen Monty*, we'll never know.







» [Spectrum] Shark in the mine! Health and safety's going to have a field day.

"absolutely what I'd have chosen myself" and made the conversion "the better of the two *On The Runs*."

The conversion was done by Micro Projects Limited, set up by Jason Perkins (now director of Curve Studios), Tony Clarke and Mark Rogers. Jason remembers how Pete gave the team level designs and artwork, including printouts of Spectrum sprites, which were meticulously re-created on the C64, pixel by pixel. Data dumps were provided for background tile sets, but these needed amending, as Jason explains: "One advantage the C64 had over the Speccy was its 40-character display, compared to 32 on the Sinclair machine. This meant a straight port would have left blank areas at the side of the screen." The solution was mostly to centre the 32-character screens of the Spectrum version and fill the remaining space with additional artwork. "We also made a number of original objects – plant pots, wine bottles, traffic cones – that we could place anywhere on the screen to help disguise areas where the duplication of rows looked a bit obvious," he adds.

This approach might seem a bit 'bare minimum', but Jason remembers that Gremlin had given Micro Projects only four weeks to complete the conversion. Also, the decision to go with high-res Spectrum-style graphics came after experimentation.

"We tried using the C64's twin-pixel multicoloured mode, but it was difficult to get anything looking good, and the deadline meant redoing all of the art wasn't really an option," says Jason. Although the team had the C64's extra memory, it lacked time, and so ambitious plans to code a full-scrolling C5 section had to be abandoned. "But, to be honest, the Spectrum game was in such good shape when we got involved that it was a fairly straightforward development to get it up and running on the Commodore," considers Jason. "And we were very happy with the finished game, which was reflected in the reviews. We knew it was good."

MINI MOLE

Jason also worked on another *On The Run*, this time for the C16. "That could have been a great home computer, but Commodore released it without hardware sprites. And with the hardware flopping in the US, the company dumped it in Europe, meaning there were loads of units around," grumbles Jason, who tells us that Commodore sent him, out of the blue, a free machine and disk drive, hoping he'd develop games for it. Ten C16 titles were sold to Gremlin by Micro Projects, but the company closed by the time the *On The Run* order arrived, and so Jason teamed with Terry Lloyd, who he remembers was "a big fan of the *Monty Mole* series and a great graphics artist and level designer".

With no hardware sprites and only 16K of RAM available, the game had to be stripped back, without losing its essence. "We established that we could only have four moving sprites on the screen at once, including Monty, so went to work filleting the existing levels and reducing the overall content," explains Jason. "We felt as long as we kept the main control system for Monty, maintained the frantic dodging of moving objects and kept the crushers, the conversion would be possible."

The team used the same trick as with the C64 version, stretching the edges of the map to fill the 40-character screen, although major redesigns perhaps made that less necessary; elsewhere, other than Monty, it was determined that all moving objects would only travel horizontally or vertically. "It was a simple process to pre-pixel-scroll the moving characters at the start of each screen," says Jason.

Although simpler than the other 8-bit versions, the C16 conversion was lauded by the press, with *Commodore User* awarding it a

NUMBER-ONE SCORE

THE C64 VERSION of *Monty On The Run* was an impressive, great-looking conversion, but it was Rob Hubbard's soundtrack – often considered the C64's best – that really set it apart from other games of the day. "It was based on a tape Gremlin sent me [of *Devil's Galop*] and they asked me to do something similar, so I expanded it as much as I could and added some additional parts," recalls Rob. "The solo in the middle was the result of a pitch-bend routine I'd added to the player, and everything was 6502 assembler and hard coded in '.byte' statements. I basically coded a guitar-type solo I worked out on a piano until it approximated what I heard in my head, as it were! There was also a third section at the end, which was a frenetic build-up to the climax, before the music looped. Add in the sound effects and the whole thing was less than 5KB!"

Screen Star and declaring it the "definitive C16 platform game". Jason remains happy with the conversion, which was completed on time, in just a few weeks. More importantly, it captured the key gameplay elements of the *Monty Mole* series: "The C16 community was happy as, for once, a publisher was taking the machine seriously and developing a well-respected franchise for it, rather than releasing a pile of old crap to make a quick buck."

> **"Where else can you do somersaults as a fat, one-eyed mole with a coal fixation?"**

GOODBYE, MONTY

Back on the Spectrum, the final commercially released *Monty Mole* title Pete worked on was *Auf Wiedersehen Monty*, presumably intended, given its title, to be the character's swan song. The game took the basic blueprint from *Monty On The Run*, but tasked Monty with exploring Europe, his aim being to earn enough cash to buy an island. This was achieved by picking up money carelessly left lying about, along with pilfering objects and selling them on. The opaque puzzles combined with irritating new features – an annoying in-game arcade sequence where you attack a biplane with your craft's propellers; control-reversing wine pick-ups; icy areas where Monty randomly slides about – resulted in a game that lost the purity of its predecessor. On the Spectrum, at least, it rated highly, but *Zzap!64* slammed the C64 conversion, arguing that "even the most ardent of *Monty* fans is likely to be disappointed".

Pete isn't quick to defend his creation. "We overworked it," he admits. "We tried to do a lot more with *Auf*, and quite a lot of it worked, but there were not enough genuinely new ideas and they felt a bit forced." He recalls enjoying creating the map – "We got a lot more screens in, with a nice representation of real European locations" – and liked the sticky platforms that Monty could walk on, upside down. But the drunk mode? "Yeah, that was contrived… The entire game was a bit like how *Jet Set Willy* felt to me – it lost a bit of fun and originality in trying to add too much."

Still, Pete at least gave Monty some breakdancing lessons. "That was due to Ben [Daglish] doing such a popping tune. I looked at the graphics we'd done and thought they could be strung together into a dance. When I tried that, I couldn't stop laughing, so they stayed." He says game development can be like that, and you should never be afraid to deviate from the plan and try something for the fun of it. "One reason I stopped coding ten years ago was the restrictions placed on us by 'producers', one being 'thou shalt not deviate from the schedule'." Should *Auf Wiedersehen Monty* have perhaps had more deviations? "Well, maybe more time. It's not a game too far, but a game too early," considers Pete. "It needed longer before we created it, for it to be more original. But then I also stand by the principle that appears as true for games as films: never watch the third of a trilogy, because all the best stuff was used in the first two!"

IMOLE

Bar an appearance on a covermount (see '*Moley Christmas*') and a Core-designed outing so at odds with other *Monty Mole* games that it barely qualifies as an entry in the series ('*Impossamole*'), our bug-chomping chum has been silent for two decades, but Pete plans to resurrect the character. "I have two *Monty* games in my head. One is a full-on original, with all-new content. The other is a tribute to my favourite – *On The Run* – with tweaks to omit things that now irritate me," he reveals. Some changes are to be minor – ditching the cloud lift in the second screen, for example – but others should prove very interesting: "There will be achievements and different ways of playing the same map, including training maps and a multiplayer mode that might include *Thing On A Spring*-style slippers."

The game is slated for a 2012 release on iOS (see **harrap.net** for progress reports), and Pete's experimenting with control methods to ensure that Apple's buttonless device doesn't lead to myriad dead moles: "Imagine touching Monty and sketching where he goes, tapping to make him jump. Another method involves gesture-based swipes and flicks. Both are intended to be intuitive." And, as you might expect, this is a labour of love for the veteran games designer: "I'm doing it because I enjoy it. It won't cost much, and hopefully it'll bring a smile to players, old and new. My grandson keeps asking when it'll be ready, and he's only four!"

To close, we ask why Pete thinks Monty's so fondly remembered, especially considering how frustrating some of the screens in his games are. "I hope it's because they were fun to play," he begins, "but, for me, it's because where else can you do somersaults as a fat, one-eyed mole with a coal fixation? Now, where's me jetpack?"



» [C64] It's a mole! In a jetpack! 50 billion times better than *Impossamole*'s superhero rubbish.



» [Spectrum] And we always thought the Eiffel Tower was taller than a dozen upright moles…

IMPOSSAMOLE

GREMLIN'S FINAL CRACK at a *Monty Mole* game arrived in 1990. Created by Core Design, *Impossamole* had the odd nod to earlier games in the series – crushers, a mine cart in the first level – but the gameplay was far closer in feel to Core's own *Rick Dangerous*. Also, Monty had the ability to kick his foes' faces off and was, at times, armed to the teeth. Monty with a bazooka is a far cry from an insectivore scrabbling around for a bit of coal to keep warm.

The result was a title that divided opinion, between those who enjoyed the lush graphics and challenge and those who didn't care for its sluggishness, excessive difficulty and lack of innovation. Pete wasn't impressed by what he saw: "I never played it and didn't like the idea." Still, he admits that "there might be a cape power-up in the iOS *Monty On The Run* multiplayer maps".



» [Spectrum] Monty forlornly looks on in *Impossamole*, the mine cart reminding him of better times.

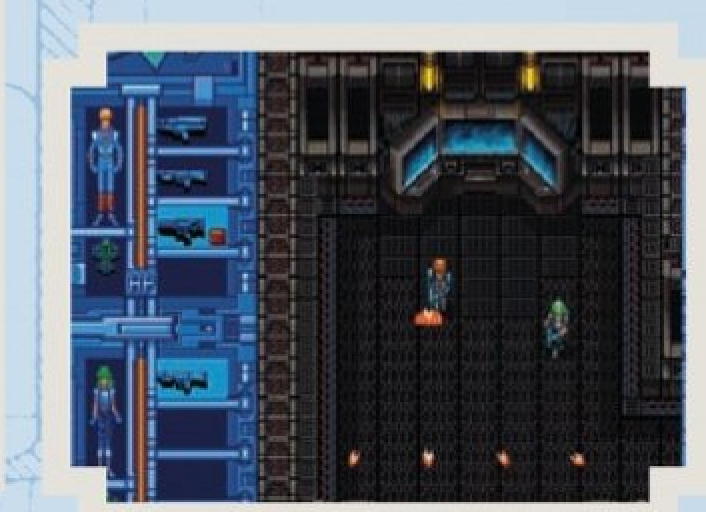
» YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO FORGOTTEN GAME SYSTEMS

OBSCURA MACHINA

#9 Sharp X68000







JUST THE FACTS

The power switch on the X68000 was a 'soft-on switch', which signalled the OS to power up or shut itself down

Although Sharp never officially supported a CD drive, it was possible to hook one up

The X68000 uses the same CPU as the Amiga, Atari ST, Apple Mac, Mega Drive and Neo Geo

There were around 20 different models released, with names including Ace, Super, Expert and Pro

One of the more expensive premium setups was advertised at 466,000 yen on TV. Based on exchange rates at the time and factoring in inflation, this would be around £4,300 today

Sharp's original slogan for the X68000 was 'Yume o koeta' ('Beyond dreams')

It supported use of a mouse, in addition to joysticks, control pads and 3D goggles

The X68000 had its own variant of BASIC, called X-BASIC

Founder and president of M2, Naoki Horii, claims that his first computer was an X68000

To appreciate the X68000, you need to know what came before. In 1976, Sharp initiated a business strategy called 'new lifestyle', which involved staff from different divisions working together on distinctive new technologies. This produced some incredible gadgets, and led to the MZ range of computers and the X1 computer in 1982, the direct predecessor to the X68000. Sharp proudly touts the X1 as the world's first computer for use on a TV, and while it found success, often having the superior version of cross-platform games, it couldn't best the juggernaut that was NEC and its PC-88 range.

In 1985, the value of the yen shot up, harming Japan's exports, and the next year, while competitors struggled, Sharp recorded increased profits for the tenth consecutive year. June of 1986 then saw Sharp's president, Akira Saeki, appointed as chairman, with Haruo Tsuji taking his place as president, ready to tackle the changing market. Having partnered with Hudson, Sharp unveiled the phenomenally powerful X68000 at Japan's CEATEC expo just four months later, in October. The following month it was dazzling hobbyist magazines such as the Sharp-focused *Oh!MZ*, which ran seven pages covering its "shocking debut" and later rebranded itself as *Oh!X*. The X68000 then launched in February 1987.

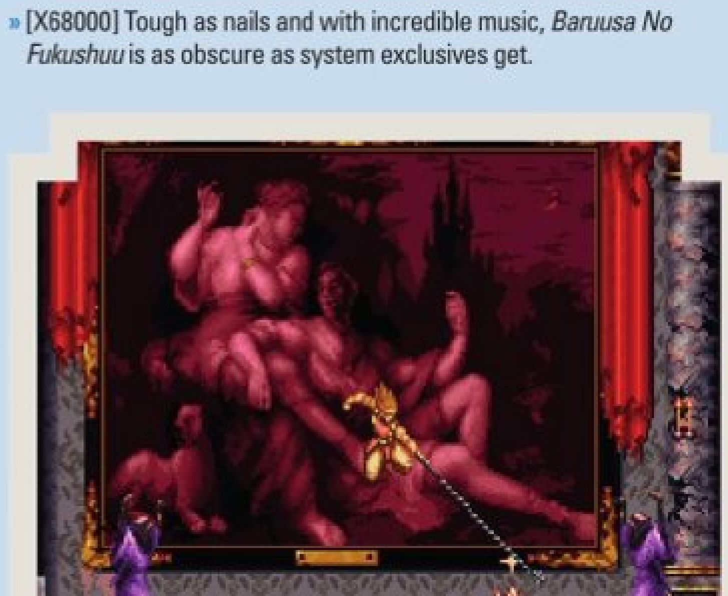
Due to the age of the X68000, Sharp no longer employs anyone directly involved with it, which is unfortunate since it denies us a definitive answer regarding the design of its casing. Resembling the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, it has, for the longest time, been referred to in Japanese as the 'Manhattan shape', but without access to the original team, the true origin of this design and name is likely lost to history.

Having already experienced NEC's total domination of the general user home computer market, Sharp positioned its X68000 as a super-expensive, extremely powerful, elite computer for musicians, graphic artists and game enthusiasts. TV adverts showed fancy CG footage, music composition and cutting-edge games that were otherwise unavailable at home, roping in a number of semi-celebrities to endorse it – one was game critic Akira Yamashita, well-regarded at the time for his writings on adventure games.

As could be expected when targeting such a niche, the X68000 held only a tiny fraction of the market. The Nomura Research Institute published data showing that, by 1991, NEC and Seiko held 60 per cent of the market with their PC-98 models. Four other hardware manufacturers rounded off the list with a combined 28.4 per cent market share, which put Apple, an American company, at number six with 5.8 per cent. Sharp was relegated to the 'Other' category, with an unpublished percentage less than that of Apple. Seeking commentary on these shocking figures, we spoke to Kobushi, Japan resident and leading expert at Tokugawa Corp, the internet's



» [X68000] Tough as nails and with incredible music, *Baruusa No Fukushuu* is as obscure as system exclusives get.



» [X68000] *Castlevania Chronicles* was eventually released for the PSone in 2001 and is now available to download on the PSN Store.

It was one of the, if not the, most powerful home computers of its time, and it was released only in Japan. John Szczepaniak looks at the Sharp X68000

PERFECT THREE

AQUALES

With an excellent grappling hook mechanic, exquisite graphics, hard rock soundtrack, awesome weapons like napalm, which travels along ceilings, and some great set pieces, *Aquales* is absolutely essential.

GEOGRAPH SEAL

Developed by the same team behind *Jumping Flash!* on the PSone, this plays like its successor, with an emphasis on gunplay, massive bosses and super music. It features the exact same double jump.

CHO REN SHA 68K

The X68000 was a shoot-'em-up fan's dream, with a sizable portion of its commercial library and many doujin titles dedicated to the genre. *Cho Ren Sha* is one of the better-known doujin shmups.















» The November 1986 issue of Sharp hobbyist magazine *Oh!MZ*, showcasing the X68000.

leading source on Japanese computers. He explained: "The X68 always had more mindshare than actual sales, and a very small but strong community of computer geeks developed around it. On the other hand, the X68 had no real business presence at all."

The mention of community is significant, since while in the West it's best known for arcade ports and original games like *Castlevania Chronicles*, in Japan the X68000 was supported into this century by fan groups coding homebrew 'doujin' software. In fact, taking into account both professional and fan-made titles, there are hundreds upon hundreds of amazing games, many exclusive to the system. Choosing a top three was a daunting task, while focusing on ports is a waste of the X68000's potential.

Two interesting points while searching archives was the name *Gekikou Dennou Club* on several title screens, and also the appearance of what appeared to be X68000 CDs. Kobushi explained: "This is pretty hardcore territory, and Sharp never officially supported it, but yes, it is definitely possible to attach an external SCSI CD-ROM drive using a specialist device driver. There is some CD software out there, such as the *Gekikou Dennou Club*. [This] was a seven-part supplement to *Dennou Club*, a disk magazine for the X68 that ran from May 1988 to August 2000. It's not doujin, although *Dennou Club* often contained reader-submitted material. The doujin group Jitensha Sougyou also released a few CD games in the 2000s, but this was way after the system's prime, and most people probably just used an emulator."

Of course, with the high price of importing a machine, the easiest method for Westerners exploring the X68000's vast catalogue is emulation. A 2000 interview with the Win68k emulator author Kenjo revealed that Sharp had actually relinquished its rights to the X68000. Again, Kobushi filled in the blanks: "The operating system, Human68k, BIOS files, an SDK, and other applications were released on the @nifty Sharp product users' forum on 1 April 2000, with the consent of Sharp, Hudson and the other contributing companies. This means that the X68 OS and system emulation is 100 per cent legal – pirating games is still a copyright violation, however."

And with that revelation, what are you waiting for? There's a world of untapped games out there.

Many thanks to all those at Tokugawa Corporation (fullmotionvideo.free.fr). Thanks also to Jasper Credland of Sharp for arranging contact with the Japanese head office.



Following a run of disappointing arcade tie-ins, The Revenge Of Shinobi marked the start of great things from the Mega Drive. Stuart Hunt speaks to its director, Noriyoshi Ohba, to discover more about this significant Sega release



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- » **GENRE:** ACTION

The Mega Drive was hardly blessed with the most dazzling selection of launch titles. In fact, Japanese gamers had a measly two to choose from. The machine launched in Japan in 1988 with the forgettable couplet of *Space Harrier II* and *Super Thunder Blade*. Both unremarkable sequels to Sega coin-ops, these were followed by a port of the okay *Altered Beast* (*Juoki*) later that year, which marked the console's first legitimate arcade port. Though Sega was billing the Mega Drive as a machine capable of bringing the true arcade experience to the home, it's fair to say that had things continued down this path, the future would have looked pretty bleak for the console. Thankfully, they didn't.

In December 1989, Sega released two Mega Drive games that turned the tide for its brand new machine: a solid 16-bit port of its successful *Golden Axe* coin-op and a great sequel to one of its popular arcade hits. That sequel was *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, and it very quickly became a must-own title. Looking better than anything that had appeared on a home console or computer up to that point, it was the first Mega Drive release that really opened people's eyes to what the machine was truly capable of delivering, something its director and *Shinobi* creator, Noriyoshi Ohba, puts down to the game's success.

"We were adamant that *The Revenge Of Shinobi* would make full use of hardware functions available at the time," reveals Ohba. "If you look at its backgrounds, for example, in usual Mega Drive games there are only two layers of scrolling. However, in *The Super Shinobi* [*Revenge Of Shinobi*'s Japanese title] there are three to four in many stages, and this added a lot of depth that just wasn't seen in Mega Drive games at the time."

As well as clearly showing people what that technological jump to





» [Mega Drive] *The Revenge Of Shinobi* features a who's who of Eighties pop culture icons, cheekily used without seeking permission from the property holders.

16-bit looked and played like, *The Revenge Of Shinobi* represented a title that also showed a clear change in thinking happening with regard to how best to transfer popular arcade properties to home consoles. Typically, arcade games were designed in such a way as to offer simple and easy-to-grasp gameplay, quick frills and alluring graphics to suck people in and separate them from their cash as quickly as possible. They were therefore designed to be fun, challenging and reasonably short. Sega realised early on that these types of games not only made up a considerable chunk of its popular IPs at the time but also that these offerings might not sit well with gamers being asked to part with around 5,000 yen. This was most likely the reason why the machine launched in Japan with two sequels to popular coin-ops rather than straight conversions, but it was most certainly in the mind of Ohba when he started considering how best to approach creating a home console sequel to his 1987 ninja-based classic. It was his intention to produce a sequel that touched on the salient gameplay pillars of the original, but extended them to support a weightier story and elevate the franchise.

In the original coin-op, Oboro clan ninja Joe Musashi was tasked with rescuing the kidnapped children of several world leaders – or children of the fellow Oboro clansman if you're playing the Japanese version – from a criminal organisation called Zeed. After their plans are foiled, in the sequel Zeed reforms under a new banner, Neo Zeed, then kills Joe's master and kidnaps his fiancée, Naoko. Now wanting revenge, hence the title, it was a much more personal mission for Joe, one purposely thought up to evoke a more epic feel for the sequel. To achieve this, however, a few changes to the original gameplay would need to be made, which Ohba points out.

"The biggest difference between those two titles was the introduction of health points," he explains. "In the original *Shinobi,* you died when you are hit once, but in the sequel Joe has HP. We designed it this way because while *Shinobi* was designed to be played for about three minutes with one coin, *The Revenge Of Shinobi* was a console game and cost considerably more. It was also a much bigger game, so introducing a damage system was much more suitable."

"Nobody took credit for dropping the hostages; it just happened as a result of the idea to use the story as the backbone of the game," continues Ohba, referring to the first game's hostage-rescue mechanic. "We thought doing so would add depth throughout the game. And so the story of *The Revenge Of Shinobi* was to rescue Joe's fiancée, a much more important hostage!"

While all hostages bar one were removed, all other aspects of the original *Shinobi* made it across relatively unscathed. During certain stages Joe could hop between the foreground and background to get around and attack enemies, and his main method of attack remained his signature throwing

" It was a far more personal mission for Joe, purposely thought up to evoke a more epic feel for the sequel "

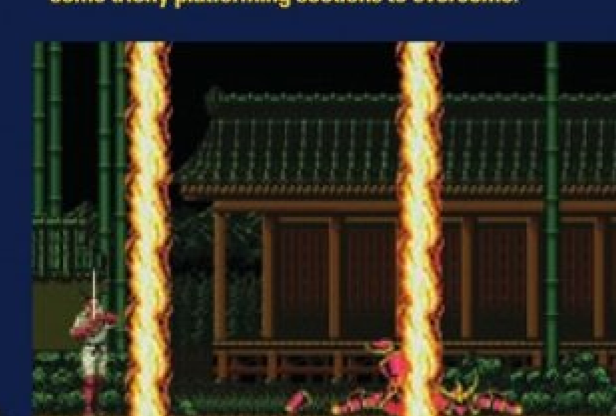
UNFIT NINJA

DESPITE BEING CREATED on the most powerful games console of the time, there was still one small thing that Noriyoshi Ohba wished to include in *The Revenge Of Shinobi* but was unable to squeeze into the finished game. So what was it that was unable to make the finished cut? An obedient canine companion, perhaps? A cool Lightsaber weapon for Joe to wield? A giant battleship boss to fight? A pair of Wrangler jeans and a checked shirt for Joe to slip into on certain stages? An enemy that resembled Robert De Niro? It's none of the aforementioned, actually. "We wanted to include bonus stages. However, we realised that they were not going to fit in the available memory. Unlike optical devices, which are commonly used nowadays, we were limited by the amount of available memory, as ROM was very pricey."





» [Mega Drive] Unlike in the original, the sequel featured some tricky platforming sections to overcome.







» [Mega Drive] There are several stages that feature the dual-plane mechanic from the original *Shinobi*, allowing Joe to freely hop between the foreground and background.



» [Mega Drive] The second stage's boss might seem tough, but a bit of Karyu magic makes short work of him.



stars – although now they were limited in number, which made the game far more challenging – only pulling out his sword for close-quarters attacks. Joe also kept his useful ninpo magic, but this was tweaked to offer a far greater influence on the gameplay, with players given the choice of which particular ninja art they wished to summon. The new selection of spells came in four flavours: Karyu, the art of fire, which caused several flaming dragon columns to emerge from the ground and sweep across the screen; Mijin, the art of pulverising, a powerful magic that causes Joe to explode at the cost of a life but replenishes his ninpo stock; Fushin, the art of floating, which heightened Joe's agility; and finally Ikazuchi, the art of thunder, which creates a shield of lightning that can absorb four enemy attacks. Each offered Joe a useful tool – and sometimes not always an obvious one – for certain stages and getting out of sticky situations. This is something that becomes especially pertinent when we broach the topic of the game's harsh difficulty level, which Ohba told us was intentional, as he wanted to design the game in such a way as to make the player think about how they could beat it. He then went on to explain to us how the magic assisted Joe and made finishing the game easier for players.

"Stage 2-3's boss, Shadow Dancer, can be beaten very easily using Karyu, as this technique inflicts damage eight times. Alternatively, the player can also use Mijin, which again causes eight damage hits. Stage 7-3's boss, Ancient Dinosaur, can be beaten using three hits of Mijin, but if playing in a higher difficulty you need eight. No matter how hard it is to beat, the Ancient Dinosaur can be easily defeated if you have four lives left at that stage. It is difficult to complete stage 7-2, but it is made easier if you use Ikazuchi. Finally, stage 6-1, Chinatown, is where you need to perform some of the longest jumps in the game. This stage was therefore designed so that you do not die if you fall. It's also made easier if you use Fushin."

One of the most iconic aspects of *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, and what many fans remember most, is its memorable cast of enemy characters, many of which famously impersonated pop-culture icons of the time. Enemies in the game sent up movie stars (Arnold **Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone), comic book heroes (Batman and Spider-Man) and even a famous rubber suit (Godzilla), and as permission was never sought by Sega at the time, these contentious bosses would force the developer to release numerous revisions of *The Revenge Of Shinobi* over the years, each having the offending boss sprites gradually altered and changed. This bizarre practice actually went on as recently as 2009, when a completely sanitised version of the game finally appeared on Nintendo's Virtual Console service. So why did many of the characters resemble familiar faces? Well, we can finally reveal the answer.**

"I made some rough sketches of characters from my mind and from some photos due to my lack of drawing ability," reveals Ohba. "They were meant to be used as a rough example. Unfortunately, the designer of the sprites reproduced my drawings a bit too faithfully and you know the end result. I personally think that if the designer had tried to show more of his own personality in those characters, they would have looked a lot different to the originals. Those bosses were created by taking each one's weak point and how to kill them into consideration. We created each of them considering what you specifically need to do to kill them, what movement you need to use to avoid the boss's attack, and then arranged them in order of difficulty."

As well as looking the part, being a truly great expansion of the original game, and coming loaded with a memorable roster of characters, *The Revenge Of Shinobi* had a classic soundtrack written by revered videogame musician Yuzo

> **"The Revenge Of Shinobi defined where one generation was finishing and a new one was beginning"**

CHANGE CLOTHES





ANOTHER OBVIOUS CHANGE that occurred in *The Revenge Of Shinobi* was to Joe's appearance. In the original 1987 *Shinobi*, the confident ninja went about his rescue mission brazenly unmasked and dressed in a charcoal grey suit that looked like it was hired from a local fancy dress shop. For the sequel, though, his style was given a rethink. Joe's face was not only concealed but he was also kitted out in a far cooler red and white shozoku. A more angelic look that has since become synonymous with the character, it has been worn by him in every *Shinobi* game he's appeared in since – unless, unlike us, you're someone who counts the terrible *The Revenge Of Shinobi* GBA game, which stars a nameless ninja dressed in a blue suit. Ohba explained to us that the reason why his look was changed for the Mega Drive *The Revenge Of Shinobi* is pretty innocuous. "Usually ninjas wear black clothes for camouflage, to hide in the darkness. However, we felt black clothes made him look like a bad guy, so to make him look more like a hero we changed his clothes to white."





Koshiro. He began his career at Falcom, and as well as *The Revenge Of Shinobi* his music has serenaded gamers through *ActRaiser* and the *Dragon Slayer*, *Ys* and *Streets Of Rage* series. Koshiro was working freelance at the time, and it would mark his first assignment for Sega. Eager to impress, he delivered an unforgettable composition that went on to further cement the game's classic status. A mixture of techno, house and electronic influences but blended with traditional Japanese instruments, it underlined the clear East-meets-West theme of the series. So was Koshiro given any direction with regard to how the music should sound, or was he simply left to his own musical devices?

"All I asked him was not to make the music sound like a traditional Japanese game. Other than that, **Mr Koshiro composed the music tracks freely,"** answers Ohba. **"When it came to the sound effects, I did make a lot of specific requests and went into quite a lot of detail, as I had a strong idea of what sounds I wanted. As a result, there were occasions where I did ask him to recompose them."**

The Revenge Of Shinobi took around six months to develop, and during that time it progressed relatively smoothly. Few technical headaches were encountered, and Ohba puts much of this down to the hardware.

What may surprise many fans, though, is that when the game was complete, Ohba felt Sega's expectations were quite low. He, on the other hand, was confident that his game would prove a hit. And, as we all know, it was.

One of the first killer apps for the Mega Drive, *The Revenge Of Shinobi* was a title that really helped define that point where one generation of gaming was finishing and a new one was beginning. Ushering in a new era for the *Shinobi* series and videogames as a whole, it raised people's expectations and marked the start of many great things to come from the 16-bit console era.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ALEX KIDD IN SHINOBI WORLD (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MASTER SYSTEM
YEAR: 1990

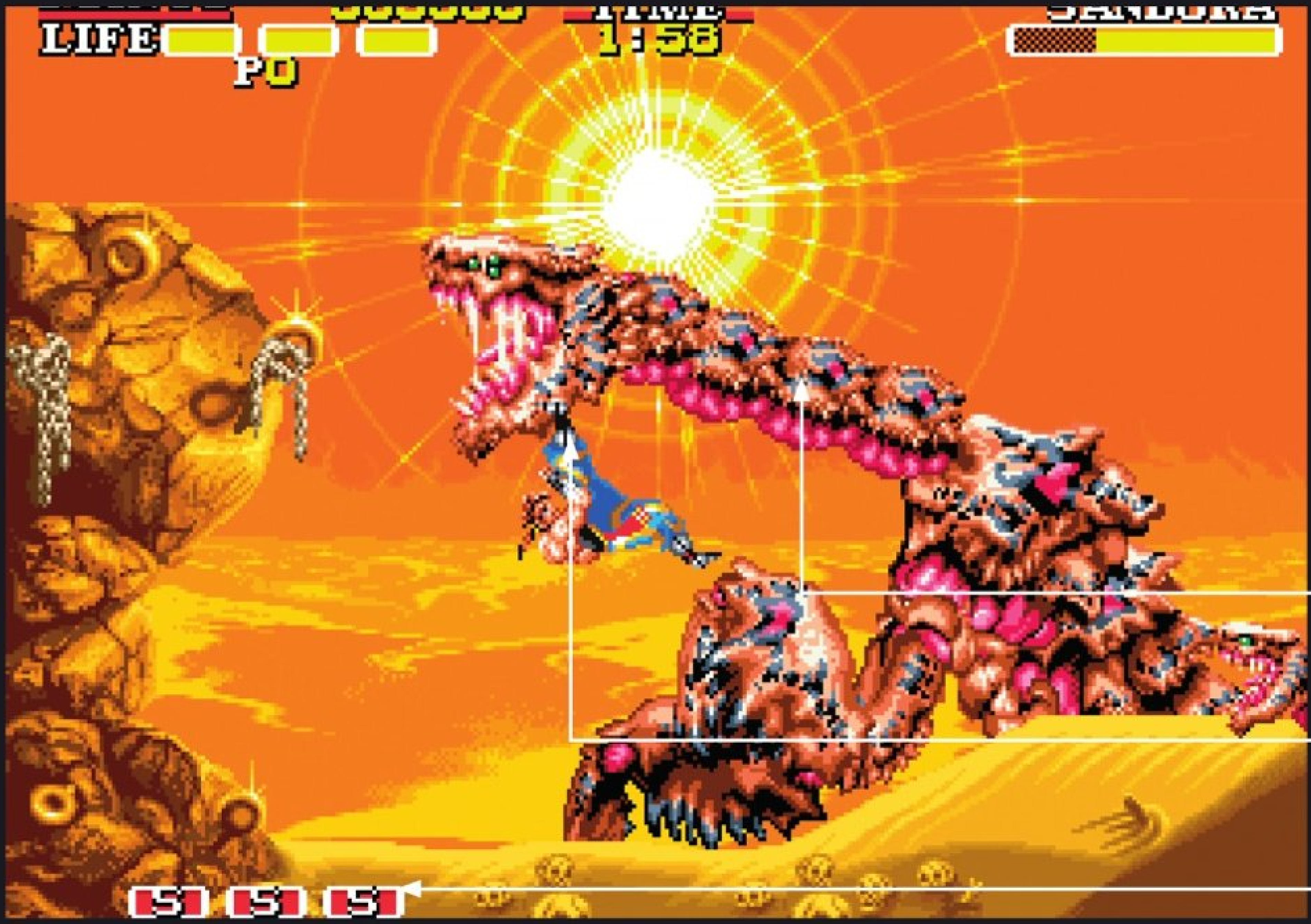
SHINOBI
SYSTEM: ARCADE, VARIOUS CONSOLES AND COMPUTERS
YEAR: 1987

STREETS OF RAGE
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1991

Special thanks to Maiko Hinson for her excellent translation work

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





IN DEPTH

» As you would expect being from the creator of *Strider*, *Osman*'s level design is exemplary, full of jaw-dropping set-piece moments that arguably top its predecessor.

» Osman attacks using only his fists and feet, no weapons. He also has a useful slide kick as well as a powerful magic attack that will clear the screen of foes.

» Osman can collect power-up vials to increase his attack power. They allow him to create useful doubles that copy his every move; there's a similar move *Strider*.

OSMAN

■ **Developer:** Mitchell Corporation ■ **Year:** 1996 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun

■ ***Osman* (known as *Cannon Dancer* in Japan) is a renowned unconverted title for what it resembles. Basically, it looks like *Strider*, plays like *Strider*, is as crazy as *Strider*, but actually has nothing to do with *Strider* – well, at least from a story perspective, anyway. Many who have been lucky enough to play it rightly regard it as an unofficial sibling to Capcom's classic, and this is because it was designed by its creator, Kouichi Yotsui.**

After Yotsui left Capcom he started working for arcade developer Mitchell Corporation, and the first thing his new employer asked of him was to make another *Strider*. So that's exactly what he did. Wanting to inject more of his own personality into the game, Yotsui would envision *Osman* as a spiritual sequel to his dazzling run-'n-slash classic, and the result was this blinding effort that actually surpasses its precursor both visually and in terms of level design. Suffice to say, it became yet another highlight in the side-scrolling action genre.

The similarities between both titles are there for all to see. From the unusual premise, which swaps out *Strider*'s futuristic Soviet Russia backdrop for an equally unusual neon Middle Eastern locale, to its balletic hero, Osman. And hopefully Darran won't edit this bit out, but in many respects, as a character, Osman feels more badass than Mr Hiryu too… if you can look past his MC Hammer trousers, which hilariously alter in hue to show how levelled-up he is.

Not only does Osman go about his business without using a single weapon, but some of the scenarios he lands himself in surpass the hostile jaw-dropping set-pieces in *Strider*. Strider faced off against wolves with a plasma sword, Osman fights tigers with his fists, Strider fought a giant robotic gorilla and a human centipede, Osman fights a grotesque scrap-metal robot, and a sand-dwelling creature that wouldn't look out of place harassing Kurt Russell in *The Thing*. And then jumps aboard a makeshift surfboard, taking to the waves to single-handedly sink a huge enemy battleship. The insanity and imagination on display at every turn can be quite exhausting, but, like *Strider*, it ensures *Osman* delivers a breathless action-packed hour or so of gaming.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

STRIDER 1989

Osman shares so much in common with *Strider* that many fans regard it as a spiritual sequel, certainly as none of the legitimate *Strider* sequels come close to matching its brilliance. See it as the exact polar opposite of Tiertex and US Gold's dismal *Strider Returns*.

KAISER KNUCKLE

■ **Developer:** Taito Corporation ■ **Year:** 1994 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up



» [Arcade] *Kaiser Knuckle*'s most notable aspect is its destructible environments, the rest is pure *Street Fighter II*-isms.

■ **This unabashed *Street Fighter II*** clone by Taito is one of the few mano-a-mano beat-'em-ups to come from the ancient Japanese developer, therefore there's this sad sense that *Kaiser Knuckle* (what a terrible name) was a release it was hoping would make a real impact. Sadly, it failed to strike a chord, and was never converted to home machines. Clinging close to the template set down by *SFII*, *Kaiser Knuckle* pits nine flamboyant-looking fighters from all around the world against one another. The *SFII* parallels continue with fireballs and outlandish special moves, six-button controls, and even a trio of boss characters, who, funnily enough, were made playable in a later revised iteration of the coin-op, which actually never saw release but has since been dumped on the interweb. With chunky cartoon *Fatal Fury*-like visuals and detailed backdrops, *Kaiser Knuckle* is actually one of the better *SFII* clones we've come by, rescued by some fluid combat, a decent array of moves and a novel feature that allows you to smash your opponent through walls – allowing you to open up new areas that are either carpeted with electricity or fire, and can have an affect the power of characters' special attacks. The novelty does start to wear quickly, though.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR 1991

From its move-set and control system to its quirky fight roster, like many unconverted one-on-one fighters, *Kaiser Knuckle* clearly took its cue from Capcom's seminal brawler. And there weren't many formats that *Street Fighter II* wasn't ported to back in the day.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

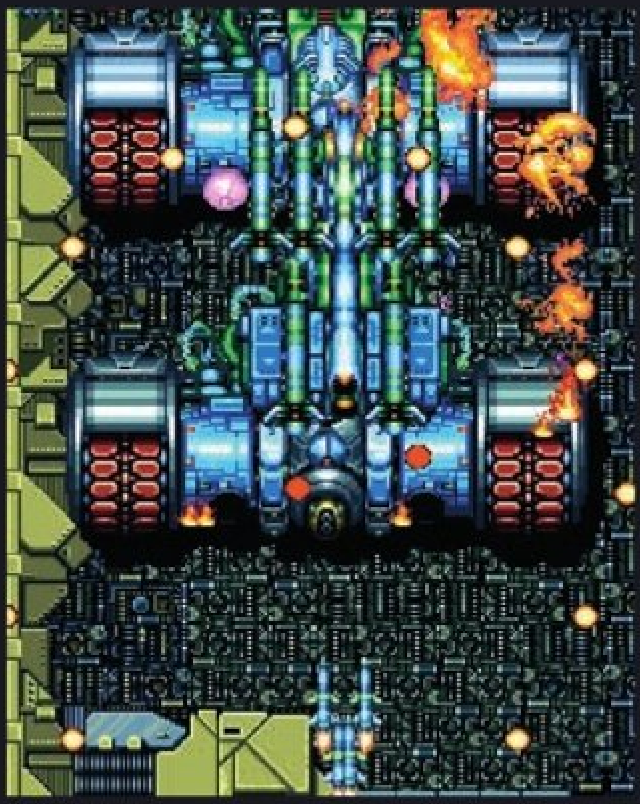
RADIANT SILVERGUN 1998

Treasure's sublime *Radiant Silvergun* is quite simply hands down one of the finest vertical shooters ever made. Treasure's sublime shooter was ported down to the Saturn and more recently appeared on Xbox Live Arcade. It too has a neat weapon system.



R-SHARK

■ **Developer:** Dooyong ■ **Year:** 1994 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



» [Arcade] *R-Shark* hits all the required notes as far shooters are concerned, but there are better examples out there.

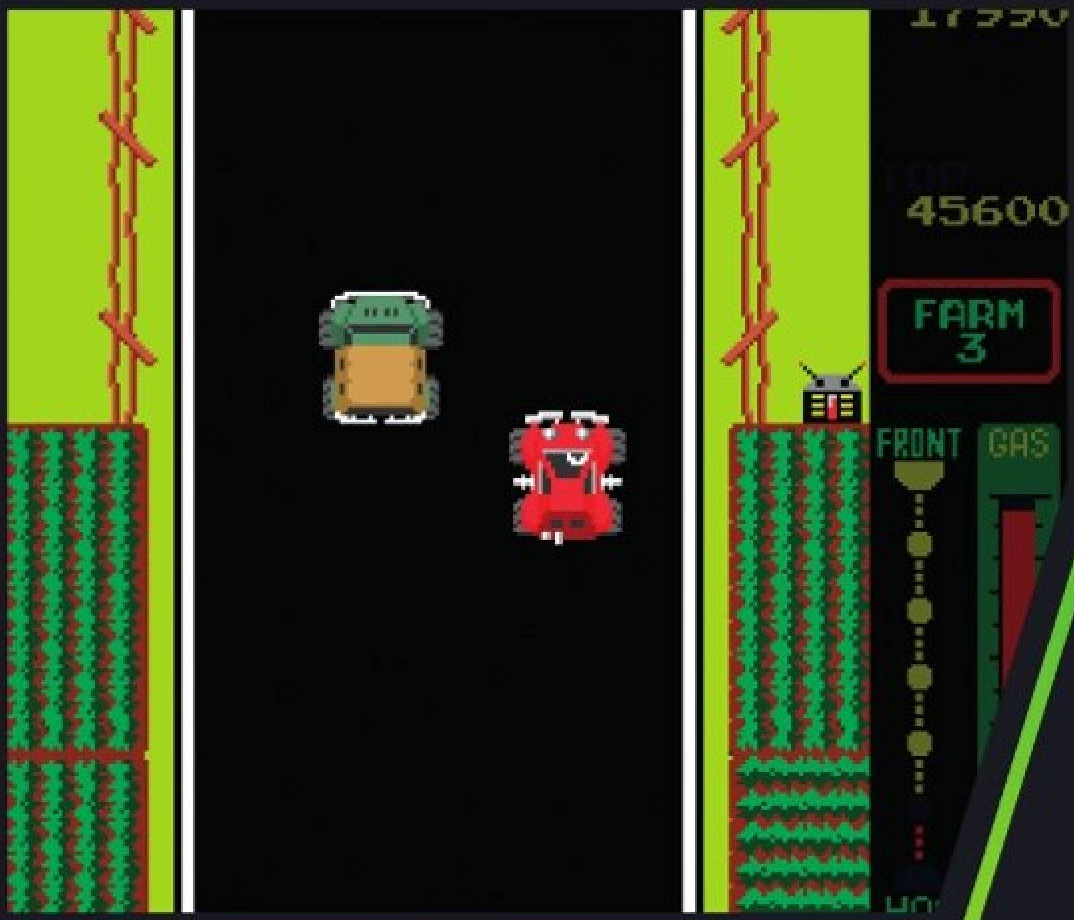
■ **On title impressions,** *R-Shark* sounds like the developer lazily smashed together the R- bit from *R-Type* with an angry fish that has featured in more shoot-'em-up titles than any other (*Battle Shark*, *Flying Shark* et al). Though, *R-Shark is* actually a well-crafted little shooter. Playing the role of an intergalactic sheriff (or so it would seem), you're tasked with arresting eight criminals. Well, we think they're criminals. Anyway, after selecting which crim you wish to kick off your arrest marathon with, you then get to select the difficulty of the action. Cascading down-screen and dropped by destroyed enemies are the numbers one to three, and each number represents not only a different weapon type, but changes the appearance of your ship, too. By collecting numbers of the same value, you can upgrade that weapon, and it allows a simple means to customise your ship. Add to the mix some large screen-filling bosses and some perfectly respectable sound and visuals and you're left with a decent little shooter.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

THE BATTLE ROAD

■ **Developer:** Irem ■ **Year:** 1984 ■ **Genre:** Racing

■ **This woeful title** from Irem was clearly trying to stand up to popular titles like *Road Fighter*, which came out in the same year, but it failed miserably. You traverse up a long and agonisingly boring stretch of road that fluctuates in width from thin to fat and is divided into unimaginative locales such as 'town' and the ever-exciting 'farm', and your aim is to successfully reach the end of each section before your car runs out of gas. While the streets are completely barren of people (everyone most likely died of boredom) the roads are full of angry cars and motorbikes, all armed and seem to have taken a real dislike to goofy red buggies, which, unfortunately, you drive. Thankfully for you it's been kitted out with three gun-turrets to help you enforce a bit of road justice. *The Battle Road* is a monotonous title that has sluggish controls, unforgiving collision detection, ugly visuals and tedious gameplay – so basically, a load of old tosh.



David Leitch

What cherished games would you take to the island?

From Spectrum listings to big-name coin-op conversions, David Leitch knows how to bring the arcade experience home. Paul Drury hears about franchises, Fatalities and cutting out the fluff

"It's like I came round and pissed in his eggnog," says David Leitch, shaking his head and glugging down more Guinness. "I saw that comment on the Retro Gamer forum about how mad a forum member and his boys still were with my version of *Double Dragon* for the Spectrum. It was just something I did. I don't wake up thinking about how I could've made it better, but it's like I ruined Christmas 1988 for them…"

Sorry, David, but by definition **Retro Gamer** readers have long memories, and even if we can forgive the indignity suffered by Billy and Jimmy Lee, especially given that it was your first professional project, we can never forget the *Double Dragon* disappointment.

Actually, the Spectrum conversion of that much-loved arcade brawler wasn't quite David's commercial debut. Having mercilessly pestered his mother, he found a ZX81 under his Christmas tree in 1981, and his bedroom soon became filled with code and teenage dreams. "It opened up a window into a realm of possibilities, all that talk of schoolboys writing games and making millions," he says, wistfully. "Oh, I sound a twat. Most of the time you were worrying about a wobbly RAM pack. It was enough to encourage me, let's say that."

Duly encouraged, David upgraded to a Spectrum and opted to take computer studies O and later A-level at school. By now, he had moved from his native Scotland far south of the border to Weymouth in Dorset, an English seaside town rich in arcades. Inspired by Centuri's *The Pit*, he programmed his own BASIC version, entitled *The Cavern*, which was good enough to appear as a listing in *Personal Computer Weekly* in February 1983, thus qualifying as his first published game.

"I didn't get paid, though," he protests. "Another pimply little bedroom boy cheated! But the great thing back then was there was only a thin wedge between what you saw in the arcades and what you could do at home. You could re-create that stuff."

Undeterred by the lack of financial recompense, David upped his game and began learning assembly language. The first fruit of his new tongue was *Antarctica*, released through Silversoft as *Freez'Bees* and later repackaged as *Frozen Penguin* by Marks & Spencer, during its brief foray into games publishing. In *Crash* issue 4, it achieved mid-table obscurity in a league of *Pengo* clones and earned him almost a grand, which we assume was the catalyst for a career in the games industry.

"No, not quite," David corrects us. "I was doing my A-levels and all set to head to university to study history at Manchester. I was living on my own then. I was lucky enough to have adventurous parents that let me do that. Or possibly pissed off parents. So I had my gap year signing on in Weymouth, playing pool and getting pissed. It sounds sad but it was one of the happiest years of my life!"

Who needs interrailing when you can be a dole boy in Dorset, eh? To be fair, David spent some of this year collaborating with his mate Kevin Brice on what would become *Professional Soccer*, and continued work on this football management simulation at university. Having completed his first year as an undergraduate, he decided to switch to the nearby University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) to take a degree in computation, before spotting an advert for programmers at Manchester's Binary Design. He was offered a position at the company, though was advised to return when he'd completed his degree. Given the choice between continuing as a penniless student and joining a busy games developer, he understandably opted for the latter and left academia behind at Easter in 1988.

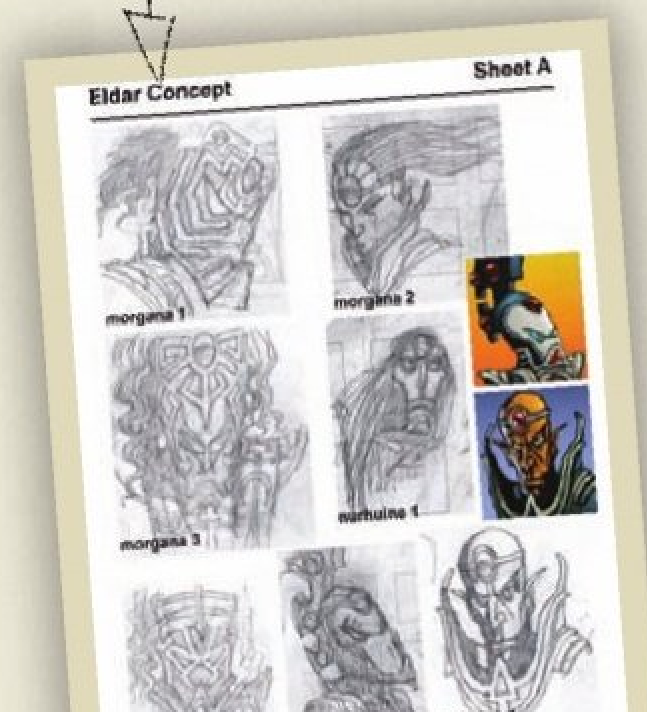
"Binary Design had a stream of work coming from Virgin and Mastertronic, so my employment must have coincided with *Double Dragon* falling off the end of the conveyor belt. It was like someone pulling a raffle ticket out of a barrel and going: 'It's you! You've won this really fucking horrible project!'"

He takes another hefty gulp of Guinness, almost as if to wash the unpleasant taste of that task from his mouth, before

Trivia

The replay mode of *Professional Soccer* featured footballers described by *Your Sinclair* magazine as "all wearing turbans". "I was pioneering the super-deformed style but in monochrome," explains David. "I'd like to call it stylised rather than… shit."

Concept art for Warhammer 40,000 on the N-Gage by Mick McMahon





“ Being in the games industry is like extended school days – people old enough to know better taking the piss out of each other **”**

Shouldn't that be Skool Daze?...

INFAMOUS FOR
Double Dragon

FIRST JOB
Programmer, Binary Design

CURRENT JOB
Managing director, Razorback Developments Ltd

FAVOURITE FILM
The 39 Steps

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Doolittle by Pixies

FAVOURITE BOOK
Risk by Dan Gardner

FIRST COMPUTER/CONSOLE
ZX81

FAVOURITE COMPUTER/CONSOLE
Nintendo DS

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
I was in the world top five at rummy in 42 All-Time Classics for several days back in 2006

BESTSELLING PRODUCT
Mortal Kombat II (Mega Drive)

BEST HOLIDAY
Ending up in Barcelona via Malta and Frankfurt for the millennium celebrations

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
Ray Mears so he can sort out dinner while I'm gaming

145235-46746546546546

SEX
M

NAME
David Leitch

DATE OF BIRTH
29 12 1966

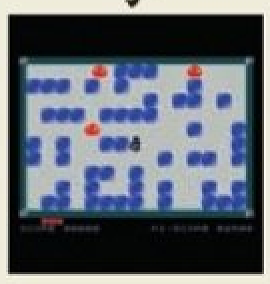
PLACE OF BIRTH
Glasgow

BIOGRAPHY
Joining Binary Design in the Eighties, David had a long career producing arcade conversions, from Shinobi on the Spectrum to Mortal Kombat II on the Mega Drive. His most recent work has been at Razorback, creating family-friendly DS games.

Timeline

1984

FREEZ'BEES
■ **YEAR:** 1984
■ **VERSION:** Spectrum
Coded while David was still at school, this respectable *Pengo* clone was later re-released by St Michael as *Frozen Penguin*.



1988

DOUBLE DRAGON
■ **YEAR:** 1988
■ **VERSION:** Spectrum
A conversion that still rankles some, David did at least get the game out in time to mar Christmas morning for Spectrum owners.



1989

SHINOBI
■ **YEAR:** 1989
■ **VERSION:** Spectrum
A decent port of the much-loved arcade title, David managed to successfully transfer Joe Musashi's painful stoop to the Spectrum.



1992

SPEEDBALL 2
■ **YEAR:** 1992
■ **VERSION:** Master System
David did a brilliant job converting The Bitmap Brothers' brutal future sports sim for Sega's then-ageing console.



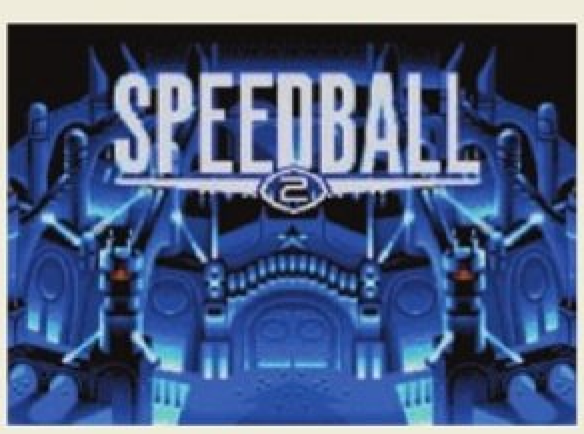
The Team On David

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about David's games…





Darran Jones
I never knew that David was involved with the impressive Mega Drive port of *Mortal Kombat II*, but I do now. What's more impressive to me, though, is his involvement on the highly underrated *Medal Of Honor: Infiltrator*, which we featured in issue 94. As David points out, it's a real hidden gem that run-and-gun fans will love.





Paul Drury
David knows how to skilfully squeeze big games into small packages. His conversions of *Mortal Kombat II* and *Speedball 2* are impressively faithful, and *Helter Skelter* for the Speccy is a lovely little game. Plus, he's witty, insightful, self-deprecating, and always gets his round in.





Stuart Hunt
Being a huge fan of Sega's *Shinobi*, I was really impressed with David's Spectrum conversion. Yes, it's not perfect, but it's a huge improvement over *Double Dragon* and does a great job of capturing the essence of the arcade original. The Amstrad version is obviously a lot better than this, but then I would say that.

explaining that the project was actually excellent experience and that, for all its faults, his was the only internal version to get done on time without serious headaches. "Developing a licence-based game is an exercise in pragmatism," he explains. "A publisher has paid a load of money for the licence and they'll have decided on a release spot, usually Christmas, and pre-booked advertising. To them, actually making the game may represent just a small fraction of the money and effort involved. From their perspective, you could take a big dump in a box, write *Double Dragon* on it, and it'd still sell."

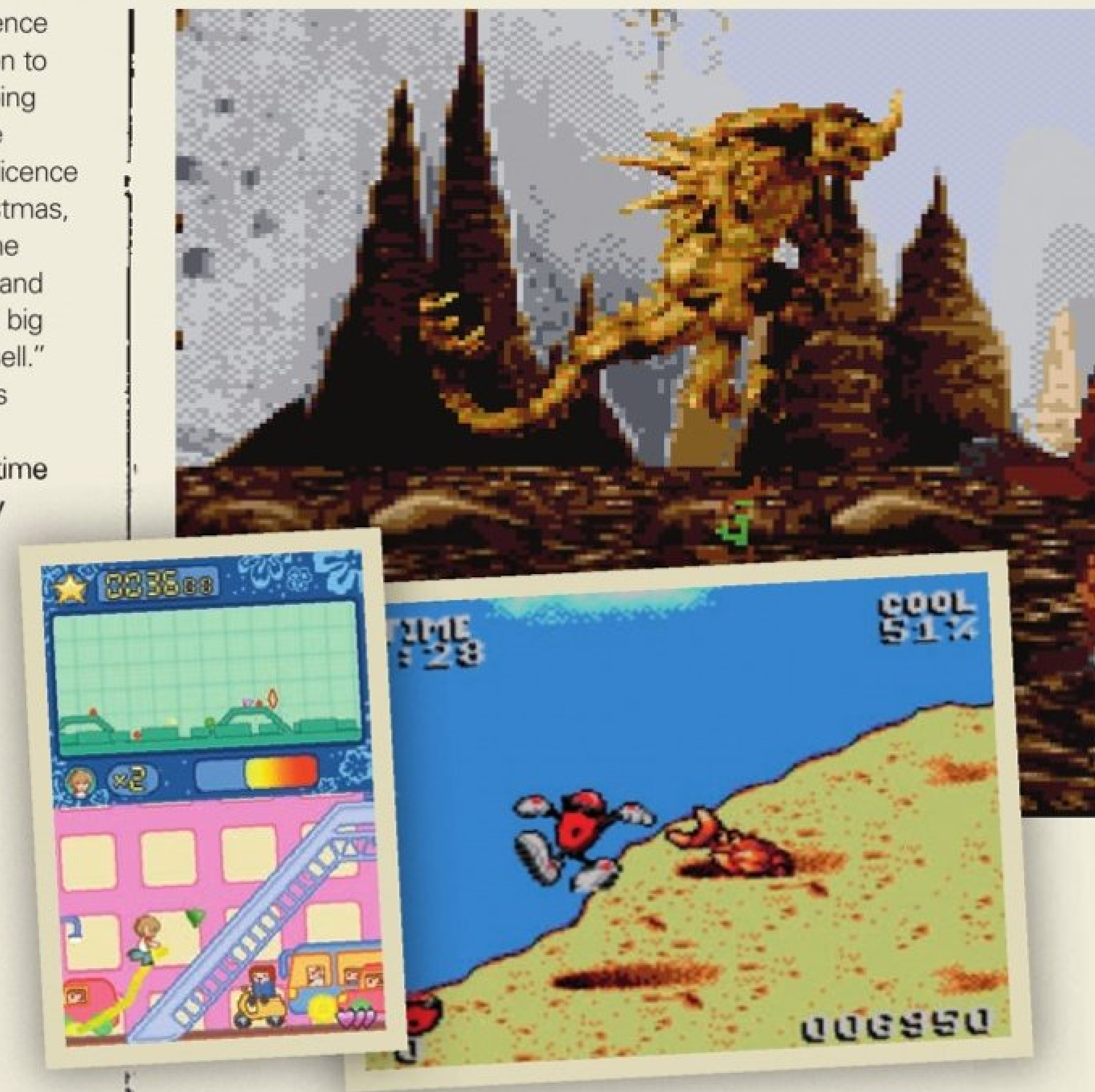
This is uncannily close to the assessment given to his conversion by most Spectrum fans, but David's bosses were so pleased that his work was on shop shelves in time for the Christmas rush that he was rewarded with a pay rise and another high-profile licence. *Shinobi* was a considerable improvement on his debut, partly due to his growing coding skills and partly because he genuinely enjoyed playing the coin-op, which sat conveniently in the Binary Design office.

Things were changing, though, both at Binary Design and in the industry as a whole. The 8-bit machines were reaching retirement age and the company was struggling to adjust. David worked on the Atari ST version of *Aaargh!*, a forgettable *Rampage* rip-off; and the PC port of top-down shooter-cum-platformer *Rotox*. "That began as a tech demo by Mick West – or Mr Logic, as we called him. He went on to work at Neversoft in the States and made a fortune with the *Tony Hawk* series. That's the most interesting thing about *Rotox*."

The punters tended to agree, and Binary Design, now renamed Creative Materials, went bust at the start of the Nineties. David headed to London to work for Sales Curve but, before he left, he rescued the unfinished Spectrum version of *Helter Skelter* from the rubble of his former employer (see boxout). His new bosses set him to work on the Spectrum port of *NARC*, Eugene Jarvis's very literal take on the war on drugs, which was named as *Crash* magazine's conversion of the year in 1991. After the critical panning given to *Double Dragon*, we decide to burst into an impromptu rendition of *Praise You* from Fatboy Slim's *You've Come A Long Way, Baby*. David remains unmoved.

"Maybe I'm more cynical about review scores," he mutters into his pint. "Yes, I'd got better, but a good conversion is about doing a good editing job. Of course, you get more technically proficient, but the main skill is

> "With Double Dragon, it's like I ruined Christmas 1988 for Spectrum gamers"
>
> *David wishes we could all forgive and forget*



» [Master System] David handled the Game Gear and Master System conversions of the bubbly *Cool Spot*.

recognising that you can't do everything and knowing what to let go and what you need to keep. Cut away the fluff, the stuff people won't miss."

After the success of *NARC*, David opted to cut away more fluff – his employer. He moved back to Weymouth and went freelance full-time, securing his first project thanks to a recommendation by industry stalwart Dan Marchant. His port of The Bitmap Brothers' *Speedball 2* to the Sega Master System was well received, and after Robert Maxwell's ill-fated wild swimming adventure led to the collapse of Mirrorsoft, he continued his conversion work at Virgin Interactive.

"*Global Gladiators* was the sequel to some cheesy McDonald's licence and was all about saving the planet," notes David, as we both pause to smell the irony. "Hey, if that's what they want, fine. Then there was *Cool Spot*, which sounds like the worst licence ever. I mean, it's the red spot off a 7Up bottle. What the fuck are you going to do with that? But the Mega Drive game is really good, and my Master System version is all right, I think. Bouncy!"

David also ported the cheerful *Cool Spot* to the Game Gear, a useful experience given his later move to handheld development, but first he was about to hit conversion pay dirt. Old Mirrorsoft mate Tony '*Helichopper*' Beckwith, who shared a house with Dan Marchant, had taken a job at Probe, and David joined him there to handle the SMS and Game Gear versions of *Terminator 2*. Working with Terry Ford, the pair did a respectable job, given the impossibility of replicating

1994



MORTAL KOMBAT II
■ **YEAR:** 1994
■ **VERSION:** Mega Drive
An impressively faithful conversion of the fighter that brought Babalities to the series. Doesn't baby Raiden look adorable in his little hat?

2000



DRIVER
■ **YEAR:** 2000
■ **VERSION:** Game Boy Color
A largely successful attempt to cram the PlayStation game into the GBC, this top-down, free-driving game is both expansive and entertaining.

2003



MEDAL OF HONOR: INFILTRATOR
■ **YEAR:** 2003
■ **VERSION:** GBA
Like *Commando* goes WWII, with a little *Metal Slug* thrown in, this recently made **RG**'s list of best original GBA games.

2011



THE STORY OF NOAH'S ARK
■ **YEAR:** 2011
■ **VERSION:** DS
David's last completed project was this interactive storybook for kids. An iOS version may follow, presumably delivered in a dove's mouth.



» [Mega Drive] *Primal Rage* proved that size does matter



» [Mega Drive] His work on *Mortal Kombat II* for the Mega Drive was one of David's finest, and most profitable, ports.

the joyous feel of the coin-op's huge lightgun on the humble home systems. However, it was the next project that would prove to be their Judgment Day.

"I'd never done any work on the Mega Drive, but they asked me to do *Mortal Kombat II* and I said okay," smiles David. "It was actually quite simple in terms of technical challenges. I mean, we had the source code and artwork from the coin-op! The chip from the arcade machine was similar to the 68000 processor in the Mega Drive; it was like translating a dialect, not learning a new language. Then I had Paul Carruthers' source code from his *Mortal Kombat* conversion, which was like scaffolding. As you develop the new game, you can start taking away the old stuff holding it up. I really didn't have any major ball-aches with this one. You'd transcribe the code, plug in your graphics, and it kind of worked, like magic!"

That magic continued into the marketplace. Thanks to Terry's judicious cutting of animation frames in places where you couldn't see the join and some clever compression routines from Nick '*Frak!*' Pelling, David's work was admirably faithful to the arcade original, and the game became a massive critical and commercial success. He hoped to work on *Mortal Kombat 3*, but when that project went elsewhere, he took on another hefty arcade conversion, *Primal Rage*.

"It was all a bit after the Lord Mayor's Show," says David, draining his glass. "There was something visceral about *Mortal Kombat*, whereas *Primal Rage* just seemed silly. The thing about the arcade game is the dinosaurs. Big, fuck-off dinosaurs. You get the impact of that on the coin-op, but it was evident that we weren't going to be able to cram these massive sprites in. Time Warner were adamant we couldn't have a bigger cartridge size. We kept reducing the size of the dinosaurs until they ended up the size of a *Mortal Kombat* character. It just lost its oomph, or whatever oomph it had…"

David tried to get back aboard the *Mortal Kombat* juggernaut and started work on a PlayStation and Saturn version of the first in the series, before Midway took back the lucrative licence to produce the games in-house. "After that, I did nothing for a couple of years. I wanted a break and I had some money in the bank. It's not like I explored Borneo or did anything adventurous. Probe had been taken over by Acclaim and were doing big team projects on the PlayStation… I got offered stuff and turned it down."

I've Got Blisters On My Fingers

"It was what we called a 'foreigner' – a project you could work on at home," explains David when we ask him about his Spectrum conversion of the ST and Amiga game *Helter Skelter*. "When Binary went down the pan, I said I'd finish it in my bedroom, which I eventually did, though as I spent a lot of my evenings commuting and trying to have a social life, it took a while. It's a nice game and turned out well."

We wholly agree and urge readers to seek out this innovative action-puzzler. We also ask if David regrets not producing original titles himself, rather than working on so many conversions. "That's not been terribly important to me," he answers. "I'm not creatively driven. I see myself as an engineer. Part of the conversion process is technically creative, and I think I'm a good editor, recognising what are the key parts I need to transcribe. I get a lot of gratification in remodelling things."



Leitch on Leitch

We asked David to pick his three favourite projects from his extensive back catalogue



■ **DOUBLE DRAGON**
"My first 'professional' job. The trouble is it's crap. Not for the want of trying, I can assure you. Unfortunately, the task exceeded whatever skills I had back then, but I do have lots of fond memories of working – actually, make that 'living' – at Binary Design when I started out."



■ **MORTAL KOMBAT II**
"Probably the most famous and certainly the most successful title I've worked on. Terry, who ported the graphics, and I were both freelancers. I remember going to the pictures shortly after we finished and seeing a trailer for the game before the film, which was rather surreal."



■ **MEDAL OF HONOR: INFILTRATOR**
"This game's a bit of a hidden gem, if I do say so myself. I worked with a very talented team and it got a very positive reception. EA loved it and there was talk of a sequel, but it didn't set the world on fire at retail. So that was that."

Readers' Questions

Merman: Did your Spectrum experience make it easy to switch to programming for the Game Boy?
They both used the Z80 processor, as did the Master System, although the Game Boy version had a reduced instruction set. So yes, the Spectrum experience did give me a leg up on the other system, but graphics-hardware-wise, the consoles were very different.

Deadpan666: I've always wondered if the cheat mode for *Shinobi* on the Spectrum meant anything. (You redefine your keys as G, R, U, T, S.)
***Gruts* is the name of a book and an LP by the 'poet, songwriter and humorist' Ivor Cutler.**

Miketendo: Which was your favourite franchise to work on and why?
It depends on what you mean by 'franchise'. Original games based on licences can be awkward, because several sets of people need to sign off on the product and it can sometimes be difficult to reach a consensus between the developer, publisher and licensor as to what should be done… and usually the licensor wins! Plus, they're most often marketing-led exercises with not a lot of time for development. In comparison, ports were pretty straightforward in terms of the politics involved, especially in the olden days when the motivation to port something was usually because it was already a successful game on another format, like a coin-op. You start out with good material and there's far more clarity about how your version should turn out. Overall, I think I've had more fun working on stuff that originated somehow or other from another game licence, like *Driver* and *Medal Of Honor*, although there was a time when I was very keen to do a *Barbie* game, but only if I could get a royalty deal on it!

Webding: When working on a conversion, what sort of pressures were put on you by the original game's company?
In the Spectrum days, the coin-op manufacturers just took the money and ran. There wasn't any support from them, but there wasn't any interference either. The pressures all came from the publishers, and they were primarily deadline-orientated. Roll on a few years and the coin-op people had become much more involved. For example, we definitely had to get everything signed off by Williams for *Mortal Kombat II*. By that stage they were taking the home systems much more seriously.

Rossi46: How pleased were you about making the Master System conversion of *Speedball 2* almost as good as the 16-bit original?
I reckon it's the best game I worked on for the Master System – for me, certainly, it was a few months well spent! It was also my first proper freelance job, so it was good that the project worked out successfully.



We choose this natural pause to replenish our drinks, and once the black stuff is flowing again, David tells us of how Gary '*Zzap!*' Liddon shipped a promising programmer named Cameron Sheppard from sunny Melbourne to salubrious Croydon and how that Aussie coder did fine work on the Game Boy and Sega 32X, before going on to found the bespoke handheld developer Crawfish. "Cameron got me to do *Space Invaders* for the Game Boy, which I really enjoyed," beams David, sporting a fine Guinness moustache. "He would show publishers *Space Invaders* and they'd go: 'That's great! You can do the Mary-Kate and Ashley game!'"

The new millennium did indeed see David working on a fair number of family-friendly titles, including several *Lego* games, though he talks with particular pride of his work on *Driver* and *Medal Of Honor* for Nintendo's handhelds. As the decade wore on, he joined Cameron once more at Razorback Developments, eventually taking up the reins as managing director when his colleague departed. The company produced over a dozen titles, from *Alex Rider* on the Game Boy Advance to *Warhammer 40,000* for Nokia's N-Gage and *Dragonology* for the DS. So, David, running your own development studio must be an exciting and rewarding challenge, eh?



» [Spectrum] *NARC* was awarded *Crash*'s conversion of the year in 1991.



» [Spectrum] *Double Dragon* for the Spectrum still gets David beaten up…

"I'd never done any work on the Mega Drive when they asked me to do Mortal Kombat II"

David's first effort was a flawless victory

Trivia

David collaborated with Nick Pelling, of *Frak!* and *Arcadians* fame, to produce *3D Pocket Pool* for the Game Boy Color. Unfortunately, in America, 'pocket pool' is slang for another sort of handheld pleasure.

He takes a large swig before answering. "It's difficult… much more difficult than what I used to do. Consumers expect a lot of content in their games now, so today's little licence-based titles need a lot more people working on them than the top coin-op conversions of yesteryear. Also, with kids-orientated licences, it can feel like we're making something just to exploit a merchandising opportunity. That's not to say you can't make a good game, but it can be tough. I am proud of the work we've done, though not necessarily in the way someone into traditional games would be. I mean, *Bella Sara* is the best fantasy horse card-trading game on the DS… and there's a fuck of a lot of horse games on the DS!"

On that bombshell, we sup up and head off to meet David's old mates and fellow industry folk Gary Liddon and Paul Carruthers. Paul is turning 50, and among his birthday guests are many veterans of the British software scene. Soon the conversation is flitting between the true lineage of *Zzap!*'s Lloyd Mangram, the size of Dave Perry's ego, and how many games they sneaked the disembodied head of Probe boss Fergus McGovern into. Watching them natter about the good and not so good old days, talking of mutual colleagues and asking, 'Whatever happened to…?', makes us turn to David and ask whether being part of the industry for a quarter of a century is like being in an extended family.

He almost chokes on his pint, laughing. "It's more like extended school days – people old enough to know better, taking the piss out of each other. The fact that we all still know each other speaks to our similarity. And sadness. There's a lot of camaraderie, but I'd stop short of the family stuff. Unless you mean like the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* family. I think we may be out with Leatherface tonight…"

David Leitch

Desert Island Disks

The games that David just couldn't live without and why he loves them

01



02



03



04



05



06



07



08



01 Robotron: 2084 COIN-OP

For its simplicity and sheer manic energy, *Robotron* is probably my favourite 'golden age' coin-op. I suck very, very badly at it, though, and I could do with the practice time that a stay on a desert island would afford.

02 The Secret Of Monkey Island PC

When I first played *Monkey Island*, I thought it was the smartest, funniest game ever. And that was about 20 years ago, so it's overdue a reprise. *LeChuck's Revenge* was equally brilliant, but the later chapters with fancier graphics did seem to go off the boil a bit. I should grab a copy of the iPad version and check out how it survived its makeover.

03 Civilization II PC

I'd hate to think how much time I spent playing *Civ II*. The sad thing is I could easily do it all over again. It's just about the perfect strategy game: the depth and balance created by the number of gameplay features and the complexity of the rules is spot-on. It's infinitely replayable and you can enjoy it, and win, without having to crazily micromanage everything. I'm also a fan of the later editions, but they did start to become a bit bloated from *Civ III* onwards.

04 X-COM: Apocalypse PC

Apocalypse isn't anywhere near as tight and polished as *Enemy Unknown* – and, thankfully, anywhere near as unforgiving as *Terror From The Deep* – but it's got a sort of ruffled charm to it, and it's my favourite of the *X-COM* strategy series. Although, arguably, the best *X-COM*-style game could actually be *Jagged Alliance 2*.

05 Zelda: Majora's Mask N64

This is the game that turned me into a Nintendo fanboy, as I love how cleverly the game is structured. With the *Groundhog Day*-style plot, it's inherently repetitive, without ever becoming dull. I'm a little bit OCD, and I find that aspect strangely appealing.

06 Advance Wars GAME BOY ADVANCE

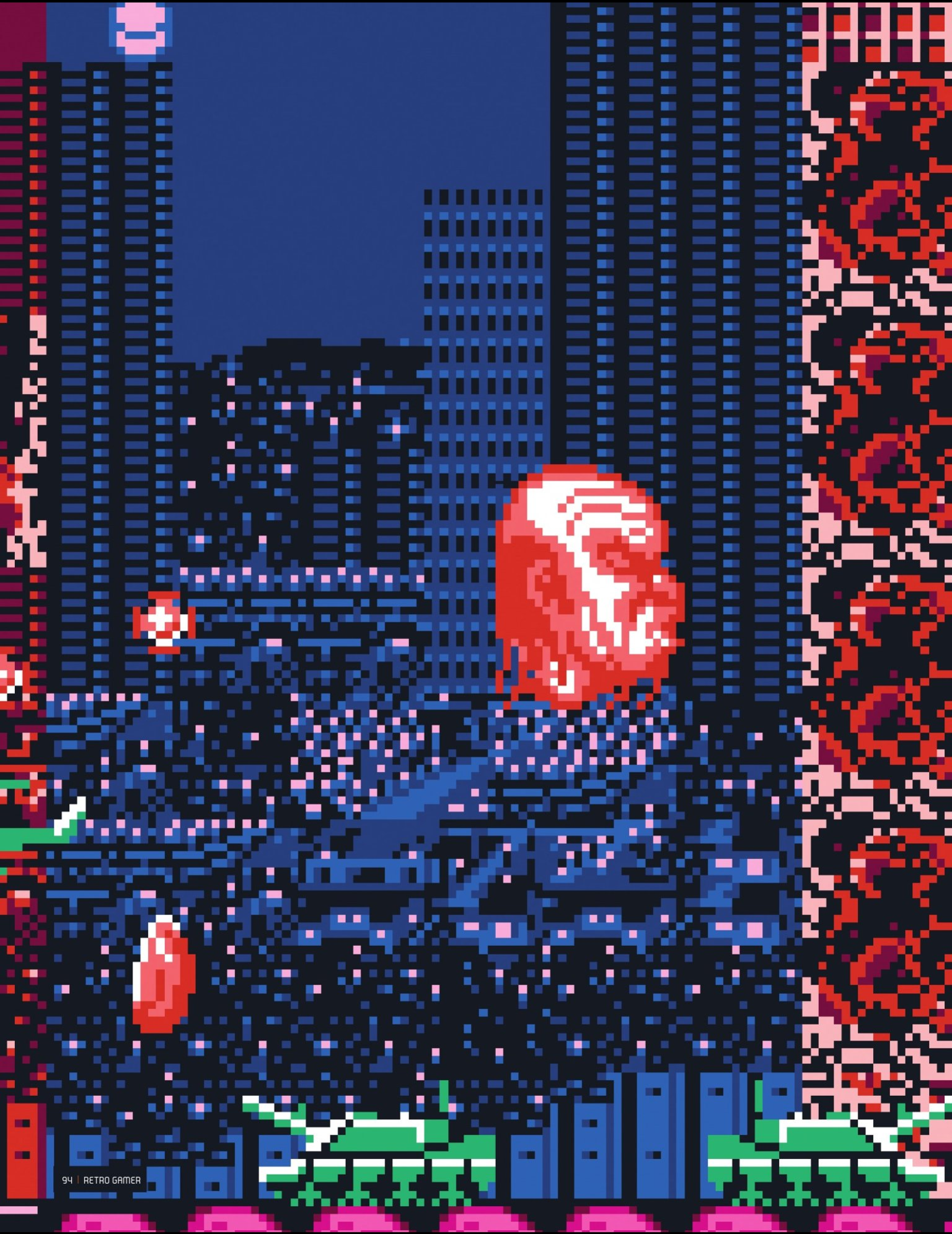
It's a toss-up between *Advance Wars* and *Fire Emblem* for this spot: essentially the same engine, same developer, both great games. I love that you play with unique characters in *FE* as opposed to the generic troops in *AW*, but I had to cheat and play *FE* on an emulator so I didn't get my favourites killed off permanently.

07 Resident Evil 4 Wii

I'd never been a fan of *Resi*. From the bits I'd tried, they seemed to consist of lots of wandering around, punctuated by the occasional pant-filling moment when a zombie lurched out of a cupboard. But *RE4* is wonderful. It's all action, beautifully paced, incredibly atmospheric, and the controls work perfectly on the Wii.

08 3D Picross NINTENDO DS

My favourite DS puzzle game. There are many, but *3D Picross* is head and shoulders above most of them, including some of the more famous ones that came out of Japan. It's a simple idea, very well executed, and the production values are top notch. I'm a sucker for the little blocky pixel art 3D creatures that get revealed as you solve the puzzles.

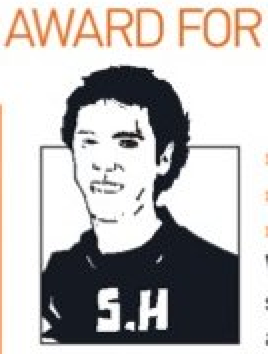




Zombie Nation

AND THE AWARD FOR THE STRANGEST NES GAME GOES TO…

» RETROREVIVAL



» MELDAC
» NES
» 1991

With most videogames you can see the thinking behind them and get exactly what it is the developer was intending to do. You can appreciate why someone thought you'd want to play a battle-hardened solider unloading slug after slug into endless enemy militia, or an all-powerful ninja warrior who can summon cool ninjitsu spells to slay mighty demon hordes. Occasionally, though, a game such as *Zombie Nation* (known as *Abarenbo Tengu* in Japan) comes along, and that act of trying to get your head around what it is you're seeing on the screen feels like an astonishing endeavour of futility.

A late release for the NES, and never receiving a European release, *Zombie Nation* was atypical of the console's normal cutesy game fare. Its frankly ridiculous story centres on a strange alien that crash lands in the Nevada desert and starts transforming people into zombies, remote controlling all manner of army vehicles and wreaking havoc all over the country. But then things begin to take a real turn for the bizarre – if that wasn't bizarre enough already. A giant, dismembered, unattractive-looking samurai head catches wind off all this and travels to the US to put a stop to the malevolent space alien, and does this by firing bullets from his head and vomiting something that looks like a spleen to destroy ground targets.

And so sets the scene of *Zombie Nation*, an insane side-scrolling shooter in which you steer something that looks like a roadie's head through four stages set around North America, shooting anything and everything while trying to rescue human hostages that get thrown into the air. Tanks, helicopters, jet fighters even the city seems to be against you, and the on-screen chaos can at points feel a little overwhelming, but the game has some wonderfully detailed visuals, lovely smooth scrolling and animation that make it more a NES curio than a catastrophe.

There's nothing else like it on the console, maybe even nothing like it on any platform, to be honest, so if you thought the NES was a bastion of the sickly and cuddly, this title is sure to have you think again. *

RETRORATED



>> It's an interesting month for digital content. Treasure re-released two of its greatest Saturn games, while Capcom drops the ball with two truly disappointing ports for Resident Evil 4 and Resident Evil Code: Veronica X

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Guardian Heroes
Treasure has overhauled its beat-'em-up. I think I prefer this to *Streets Of Rage 2* now.



STUART
Radiant Silvergun
I've always had to look enviously at Darran and his Saturn copy. Not any more…



DAVID
Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus Classics HD
Two fantastic games, with a beautiful restoration job.

Radiant Silvergun

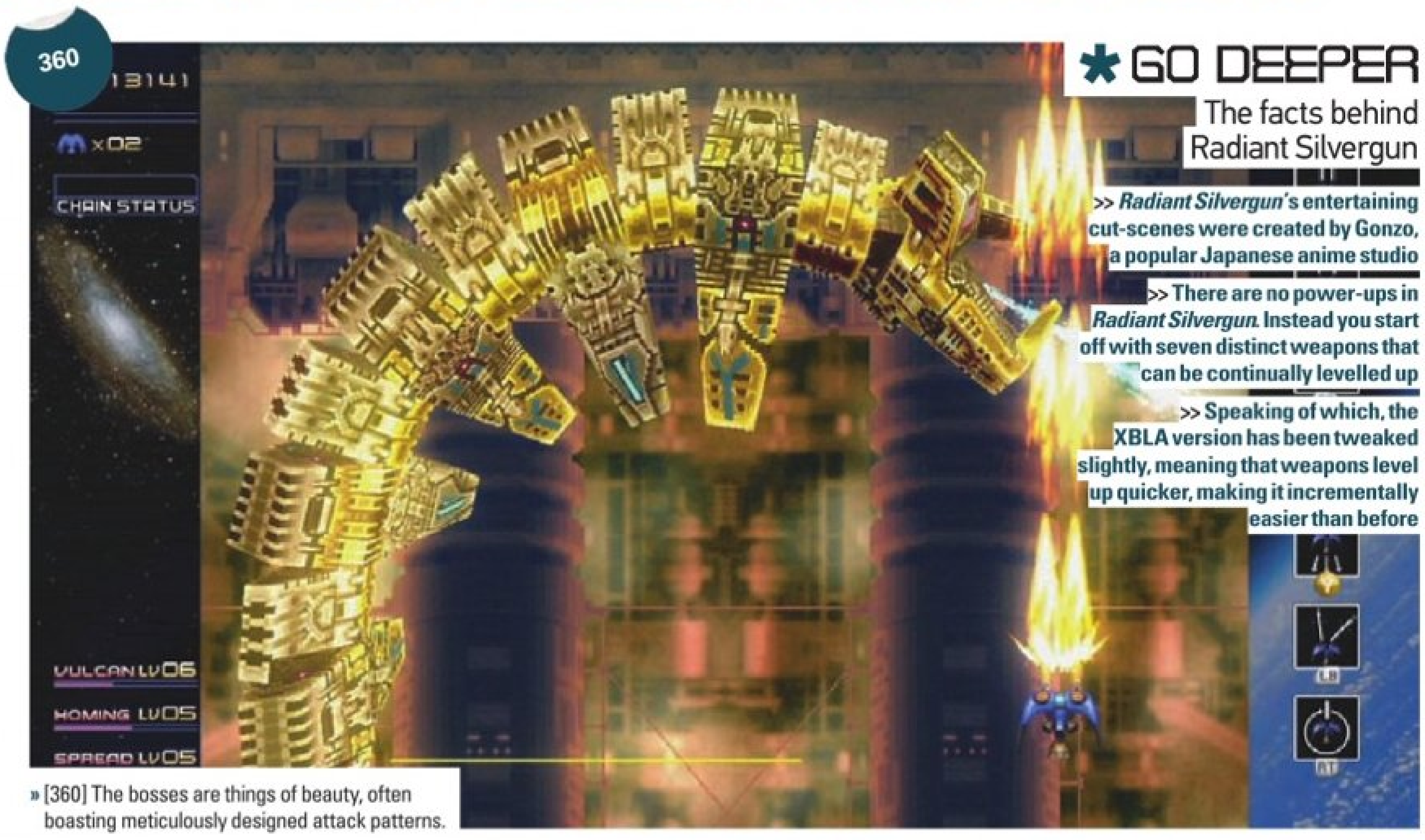
TREASURE'S SUPERB SHMUP GETS UNLEASHED ON A BRAND NEW AUDIENCE

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS (£10.60)
- **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Radiant Silvergun* was first released in arcades in 1998. Later ported to the Saturn, it reached legendary status on the machine thanks to its finely honed gameplay and inventive bosses. Despite not being that rare, its mythical appeal ensures that it regularly sells for more than £100 on auction sites.



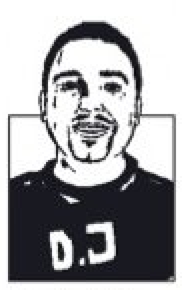
» [360] The bosses are things of beauty, often boasting meticulously designed attack patterns.

GO DEEPER
The facts behind Radiant Silvergun

>> *Radiant Silvergun*'s entertaining cut-scenes were created by Gonzo, a popular Japanese anime studio

>> There are no power-ups in *Radiant Silvergun*. Instead you start off with seven distinct weapons that can be continually levelled up

>> Speaking of which, the XBLA version has been tweaked slightly, meaning that weapons level up quicker, making it incrementally easier than before



Original developer Treasure has returned to its legendary shooter and released it on XBLA, allowing a new generation to experience its brilliance. Has it been worth the wait? The answer is a resounding yes!

Treasure has done a truly impressive job with *Radiant Silvergun*'s port, offering plenty of new tweaks to make it relevant for a modern-day audience. There are a number of new graphic filters in addition to the original Saturn visuals, the slowdown has been completely eliminated, and you can tweak the ratio of the screen and choose from a large number of different wallpapers. There are issues with playing it on a 4:3 television due to it being optimised for widescreen TVs, but it's not a deal-breaker and will hopefully be patched.

All you need to know is that *Radiant Silvergun* is a magnificent shooter that remains as beautifully paced today as it was in 1998. Certain adjustments have been made to some enemy waves and the lack of slowdown makes a few of the bosses and sections far trickier than they were originally, but *Silvergun*'s beautiful core remains intact. It's still a punishingly hard game, but a number of difficulty modes should ensure that even those with an aversion to shmups may eventually make it to the finale. Both the Arcade and Saturn Original modes are included, while Treasure also has introduced an *Ikaruga* mode, which emulates the chaining from *Silvergun*'s spiritual sequel. Add in little touches like remastering the stunning soundtrack in Dolby Digital 5.1 and Treasure really has gone all-out, which is probably why so many hardcore followers are upset about the 4:3 issue.

Radiant Silvergun may be little more than a boss rush, but it's a boss rush of epic proportions, a beautiful balance of mechanics and design that no other shooter has come close to. It remains a shining jewel in both Treasure's crown and the genre in general and shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.



WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
IMAGE FIGHT (ARCADE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
IKARUGA (GAMECUBE)





OPINION



Having never owned the original Saturn game, it's good to see that it lives up to all the hype. It's a little too hard for me, but there are more than enough options to ensure that you have a fighting chance against the relentless onslaught that Treasure throws at you.

Stuart Hunt

In a Nutshell

It's mercilessly tough and lacks the accessibility of today's games – don't judge it on its terrible demo – but Treasure's classic really does deserve all the plaudits that have been heaped upon it over the past 13 years.

>> Score **94%**



» [360] We weren't massive fans of *Guardian Heroes*' new HD look, but it has grown on us.



Guardian Heroes

TREASURE REDEFINES ONE OF ITS GREATEST GAMES

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.80) » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE » **PLAYERS:** 1-12

S.H

Wow. What a great month for Treasure fans as we're treated to not one, but two great Saturn ports. *Radiant Silvergun* impressed us, but Treasure has really gone the extra mile with its superb update of *Guardian Heroes*.

As with *Radiant Silvergun*, the visuals have been reformatted for widescreen TVs, and it features a brand new remixed graphics mode, which actually looks rather nice. The new line-drawn look isn't a patch on the lovely chunky pixels of the original game, which are also lovingly re-created, but it's a massive improvement over the usual smeared filter approach of most HD updates.

There's more than just an aesthetic change to *Guardian Heroes*, though, as Treasure has redefined many elements of the combat with its new Remix mode. Playable with either the original or new visuals, Remix adds new dodges, air recoveries, air dashes and much more to proceedings, many of which have been taken from Treasure's popular *Bleach* games. It certainly changes the dynamics of the game, making it feel more like a one-on-one fighter, but this is no bad thing and works surprisingly well within the sprawling, multi-staged story mode.

Treasure has also decided to significantly expand the multiplayer aspects of *Guardian Heroes*, allowing up to 12 online players to take part in ridiculously chaotic brawls. It's a huge step up over the already-impressive six-player offering that featured on the Saturn and is supported by solid netcode, at least on the games we've played. It's also supported with lots of customisable tweaks, so it's not as unbalanced as it was on the Saturn. There's also a brand new arcade mode, which is effectively a chaotic and immensely enjoyable online survival mode and has already proven stupidly addictive.

Treasure has not just meticulously ported a classic, but improved on it immeasurably. Quite simply, if every classic was given this sort of treatment, the world would be a better place.

» Score **96%**

OPINION

D.J

Now this is how you do an update. Treasure has not only produced a perfect port, but also found a way to make it fresh and relevant. We're certainly pleased that it decided to push the boat out with *Guardian Heroes*. Here's hoping that other developers take note.

Darran Jones

NBA Jam: On Fire Edition

EA CANADA PUMPS UP THE JAM

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £11.99 » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS » **DEVELOPER:** EA CANADA » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

D.J

After enjoying last year's *NBA Jam* revival, it's pleasing to see it return, this time in a more suitable downloadable form rather than a full retail release. While it lacks many of the additional mini-games found in last year's effort, *NBA Jam: On Fire Edition* is a far worthier update thanks to slicker controls, a number of subtle move improvements and the new 'Team Fire' mode, which endows both your players with unlimited turbo and insane dunk moves for a limited time.

There's also an insane number of extras waiting to be unlocked, which are earned by beating specific teams and bought with Jam Points, clocked up as you play each game. Unlockables range from new players to the usual quirky teams and backgrounds, and the sheer number of Jam Points you can earn in each match means there's always a reason to play a new game, as the next batch of goodies is never far.

As with last year's *NBA Jam*, this new iteration suffers from really unfair difficulty spikes as you progress into the lengthy campaign mode, but the excellent multiplayer, which supports up to four players both online or on the same system, is a real blast to play.

» Score **82%**



» [PS3] The basic gameplay of *NBA Jam* is as fun as you'll remember.



RETRORATED

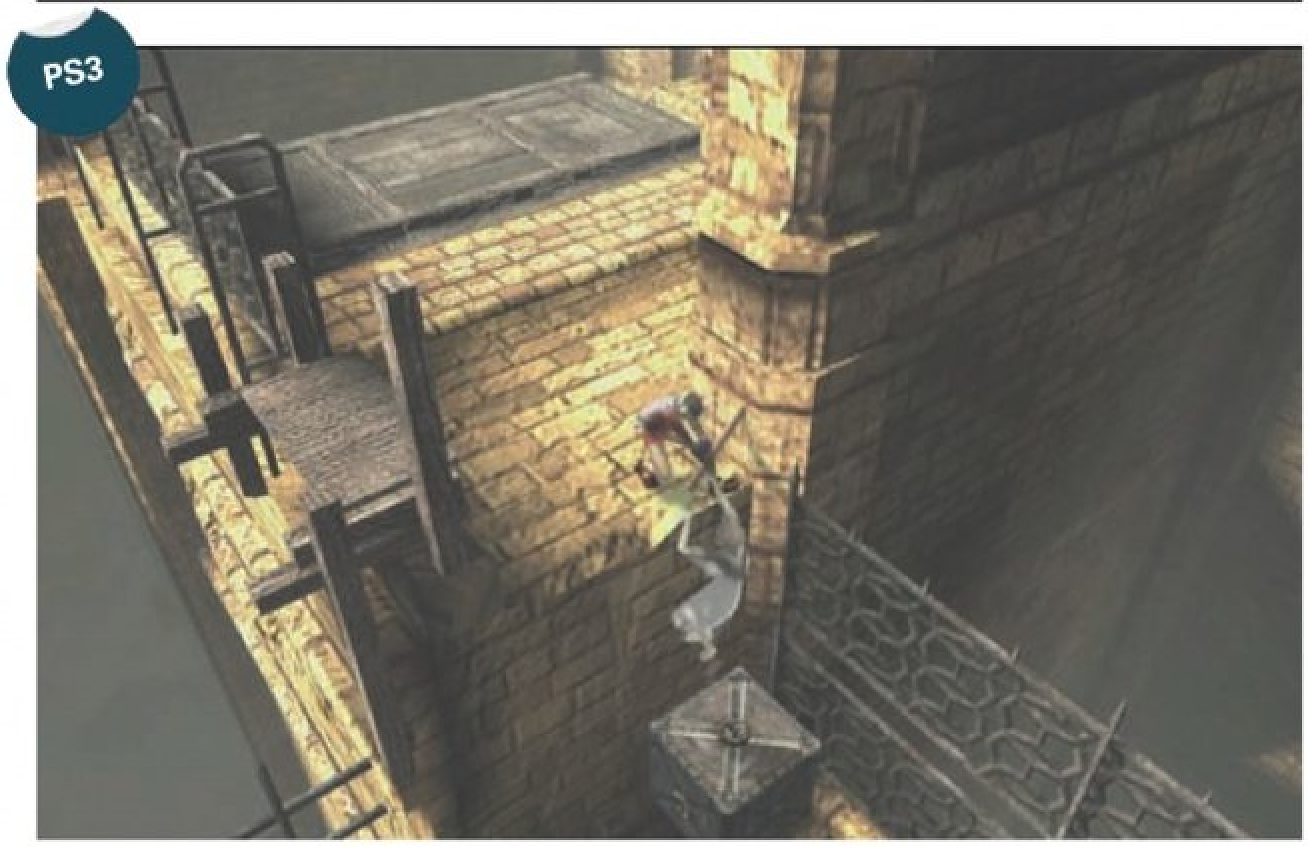
>> ICO & SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS CLASSICS HD

Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus Classics HD

RETRO GAMER SIZZLER

THE BEST HD COLLECTION YET

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £34.99
» **PUBLISHER:** SONY » **DEVELOPER:** BLUEPOINT GAMES » **PLAYERS:** 1 (1-2 ICO)



» [PS3] *Ico* benefits hugely from the high-def makeover, which breathes fresh life into the ten-year-old game.

D.J

Sony was first out of the gate with the idea of high-definition updates of classic PS2 games, so it's fitting that its latest example puts all other recent efforts to shame.

With porting duties once again handed to Bluepoint Games, the first thing that hits you is just how good both titles now look. All the frame rate issues that put people off *Shadow Of The Colossus* are nowhere to be seen, while the crisp textures really allow you to appreciate the splendour and wonder of Team Ico's beautifully crafted worlds. *Ico* perhaps fares best, due to the incredibly high levels of detail that can now be found in the massive castle that you have to explore. It's a world away from the PC ports passed off as high-definition



compilations that we usually have to settle for, and like the *God Of War* collection, it's a testament to Sony's commitment to delivering updates that are genuinely worth owning over the original versions.

While both games are stunning examples of their genres, they are let down by a few little niggles. *Ico*'s camera views still frustrate, while *SOTC*'s gorgeous backgrounds sometimes pop in and out of view, occasionally spoiling the atmosphere that Team Ico originally created.

That being said, interesting extras – including some impressive use of 3D and an informative interview – and the sheer amount of care and attention on offer makes this the best high-definition remaster currently available.

OPINION

S.H

It's amazing to think that *Ico* is a decade old now. Bluepoint Games has done both games proud, and the quality of the port bodes well for its incoming *Metal Gear Solid* compilation. Both are future classics, so pick them up now while you have the chance.

Stuart Hunt

>> Score **93%**



» [360] A party mode also exists for *Burnout Crash!*, which utilises Kinect.

Burnout Crash!

BURNOUT FINALLY CRASHES AND BURNS

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.80) » **PUBLISHER:** EA » **DEVELOPER:** CRITERION » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

S.H

***Burnout Crash!* tries to mix the high-octane thrills and spills of the original franchise with the arcade high-score-chasing of old. The end result is a surprisingly bland affair that relies far more on random chance than actual skill.**

Set across 18 junctions, *Burnout Crash!* features three distinct gameplay modes – Road Trip, Rush Hour and Pile Up – ensuring that you do get plenty of gameplay for your money.

Road Trip is the most annoying mode, which has you preventing five cars from escaping by creating a pile-up and hopefully causing incoming cars to add to it. There are various bonuses, ranging from police escorts that block off junctions to a devastating tornado that will wreck everything on screen, netting a huge score. As more damage is caused, your Crashbreaker fills up, letting you continually explode your car for more damage.

Rush Hour is next and gives you 90 seconds to cause as much mayhem



as possible. It's more fun, mainly because it doesn't feel as random as Road Trip, giving you more control over proceedings. This ensures that it offers plenty of great ways of setting up multipliers, meaning that high-score chasers are going to adore it. Pile Up is by far the hardest mode, as you need to wreck a set number of vehicles without actually destroying them. It's a neat concept, but not very well executed.

We're not snobbish enough to write off *Burnout Crash!* because it fails to emulate the original mode that it takes its name from, but we are disappointed that the scoring mechanics aren't better defined. This could have been an excellent high-score game, but the reliance on randomness and the friends-only Autolog rankings, which instantly diminish its appeal, mean there's little desire to replay it. An interesting experiment, but little more.

OPINION

D.J

If the unlocking structure was different I could simply ignore the random Road Trip and concentrate on the Rush Hour mode. Sadly it isn't, meaning you must endure much frustration to get to the good stuff. The social-based Autolog system is also disappointingly implemented.

Darran Jones

>> Score **60%**

Aliens: Infestation

WAYFORWARD GOES ON A PORTABLE BUG HUNT

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **DEVELOPER:** WAYFORWARD TECHNOLOGIES » **PLAYERS:** 1



After unleashing hell with its superb re-imagining of the *Contra* series, it's disappointing to see WayForward make so many little mistakes with *Aliens: Infestation*. Yes, it's dripping with atmosphere thanks to superbly rendered backdrops, authentic effects and plenty of loving homages to the original movies, and yes, it looks fantastic, with some exceptional sprite design, but this game lacks bite.

This in itself is something of a disappointment, as it's easy to see what WayForward is trying to achieve with *Aliens: Infestation*. For the most part, it's a loving tribute to the 16-bit days. Caught somewhere between the frenetic gunplay of the Mega Drive's *Alien 3* and the more structured approach of the SNES outing – the superior version, in our humble opinion – *Aliens: Infestation* is a decent attempt at the Metroidvania clones that are so popular on handhelds.

Unfortunately, it lacks the organic design of the games it is trying to emulate, due to poorly placed items and frustrating difficulty spikes, usually around the boss encounters. It's also short, offering around six hours of play, with little replay value. There are plenty of enjoyable mechanics like inventive mini-games – yes, Bishop's knife routine is in there – and the ability to recruit new marines when you lose members of your core group is a lovely touch, but the weedy combat and dull exploration puts a real damper on the overall package. And if WayForward does come up with a nice idea like the aforementioned recruitable marines, it doesn't build on it – all the marines are identical, rather than boasting unique abilities or stats.

Aliens: Infestation isn't a bad game by any means, but it's a disappointing waste of the licence. We can't help thinking that this would have been better in expanded form on Xbox Live Arcade.

>> Score **68%**



» [DS] You can't see it here, but the animation is fantastic, like we'd expect from WayForward.



OPINION



I was really looking forward to this but was left disappointed. There's no question it's a loving homage to the 16-bit run-and-gun genre and the movies, but what lies beneath is short and unsatisfying. With a few design tweaks this could have been something really quite special.

Stuart Hunt

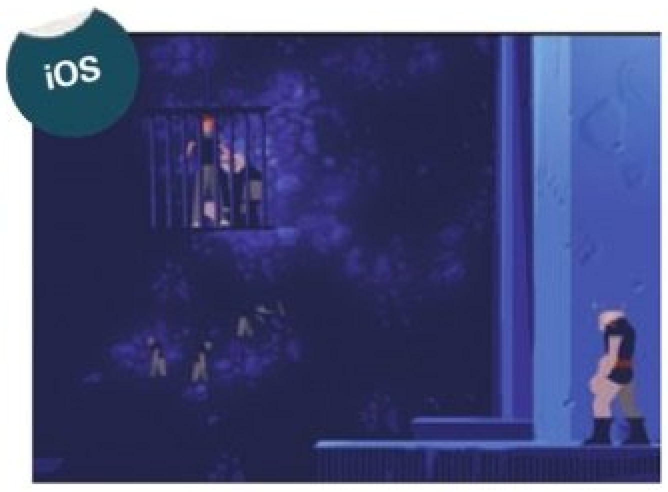


Resident Evil 4 HD

» **SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO ON:** XBOX 360
» **PRICE:** £15.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Well this is** bitterly disappointing. Capcom could have really gone to town on *Resident Evil 4* and given it the high-definition makeover that a game of this standing so obviously deserves, especially as the company's currently celebrating the franchise's 15th anniversary. Instead Capcom has simply churned out an amazingly lazy port – no Move support, nominal Trophies, new frame rate issues – which makes it very hard to recommend, especially as it's overpriced by about a fiver. There's no denying that *Resident Evil 4* is a fantastic game, and anyone who has never experienced it before is going to be very happy, but this upscaled version just can't be justified if you already own a previous version. In short, this cynical cash-in is best avoided like Las Plagas.

>> Score **75%**

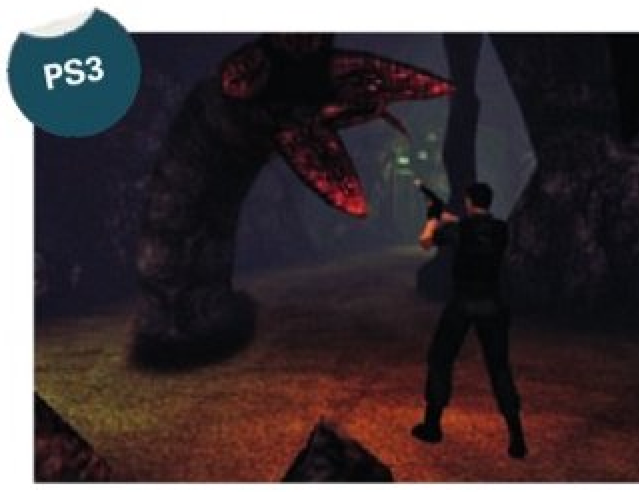


Another World: 20th Anniversary

» **SYSTEM:** iOS
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **There's still a** lot to enjoy about Eric Chahi's memorable game. This is a very good conversion as well, featuring massively improved visuals – you can instantly switch back to the original look with a quick swipe of two fingers – that really enhance an already atmospheric adventure. Only fiddly touch controls, which make certain sections needlessly difficult to play, let it down.

>> Score **78%**



Resident Evil Code: Veronica X HD

» **SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO ON:** XBOX 360
» **PRICE:** £15.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **If *Resident Evil 4 HD*** feels overpriced, *Code: Veronica* feels extortionate. Work has at least been done to improve the game's lighting, which looks very nice, but the game felt dated on release, and it's hard to recommend this download over the four versions that are already available. Another disappointing port of a genuinely enjoyable game.

>> Score **60%**

RETROROUND-UP



>> Every month we take a look at the latest classics that have been re-released for a new generation of gamers

DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Anniversary Edition

INFORMATION
» **System:** Game Boy Advance
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** DSiWare
» **Score:** ★★★★★







Well, this is a nice way to celebrate *Zelda*'s 25th anniversary. First released as an extra for the Game Boy Advance version of *A Link To The Past*, *Four Swords* is a fun multiplayer twist on the traditional *Zelda* formula that allows up to four players to compete against each other for the most rupees.

This is actually a significant retooling of the original game, as it's now possible to play on your own – the original was a multiplayer affair only – with a second Link being included to solve the game's many clever puzzles.

While the game only takes around three hours to complete, its competitive nature ensures that its replay value is high. It also features an additional world, the Realm of Memories, which includes stages from past games in the franchise.

We'd have happily paid cash for this, but the fact that it is currently being given away for nothing makes it all the sweeter.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



The King Of Fighters '96
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» SNK continues its impressive stream of Neo Geo ports with the excellent third instalment of its *King Of Fighters* series. Greatly refined over the preceding game, *'96* offers massively improved visuals and animations, seven new characters including Kasumi Todoh, Mature and Vice, and a number of new play mechanics. As usual, it's a brilliant port of a fantastic game and is easily worth its £8 asking price.



Metal Slug 2
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★★★★☆
» It may have some crippling slowdown, but *Metal Slug 2* remains an exhilarating addition to the series, thanks to its many new mechanics. There are transforming characters, new vehicles, and additional supporting characters that do everything from throw fireballs to drop food. It's likely that the superior *Metal Slug X* will eventually appear, but we're still happy playing this in the meantime.



Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins
» **System:** Game Boy
» **Buy it for:** £3.60
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» There is a lot to enjoy about Mario's second Game Boy adventure, and not just because it introduced that lovable rogue, Wario. Large sprites, cleverly designed levels and plenty of hidden secrets make this a far bigger and more enjoyable experience than Mario's first Game Boy outing. It's also much lengthier, making the usual '*Mario* tax' far easier to swallow.



Little Big Adventure
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
» **Buy it from:** GOG.com
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» GOG's securing of excellent games continues with the release of *Little Big Adventure*. Not to be confused with Media Molecule's *LittleBigPlanet*, this is a delightfully quirky adventure from Adeline Software that still charms, some 17 years after its original release. Clever puzzles, plenty of variety and genuinely memorable characters ensure that Twinsen's first adventure still has the capacity to delight.

VIRTUAL CONSOLE

There have not been many decent titles released this month, so here's the second half of the free Ambassador programme games.

Wrecking Crew
» **System:** NES
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

NES Open Tournament Golf
» **System:** NES
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Yoshi
» **System:** NES
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

Metroid
» **System:** NES
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★★

Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link
» **System:** NES
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

PC SERVICES

It's another good month for PC fans, with GOG and DotEmu getting their hands on some true classics, including some Interplay greats.

SimCity 2000: Special Edition
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
» **Buy it from:** GOG.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Star Control 3
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
» **Buy it from:** GOG.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Descent
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** €9.99 (£8.73)
» **Buy it from:** DotEmu.com
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Earthworm Jim
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** €9.99 (£8.73)
» **Buy it from:** DotEmu.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Fallout
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** €9.99 (£8.73)
» **Buy it from:** DotEmu.com
» **Score:** ★★★★★

PSN

We've received the first games from the PSone Imports range.

Sonic Wings
» **System:** PSone
» **Buy it for:** £3.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Cho Aniki
» **System:** PSone
» **Buy it for:** £3.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Gex 3D: Enter The Gecko
» **System:** PSone
» **Buy it for:** £3.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★☆☆☆☆

Fighting Force
» **System:** PSone
» **Buy it for:** £3.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★☆☆☆☆

Ikari Warriors
» **System:** Arcade
» **Buy it for:** £1.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Alpha Mission
» **System:** Arcade
» **Buy it for:** £1.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆



The review to the right talks about Colin Stewart's foray into his loft and discovery of work files for Frank N Stein, but he found more than that. Rather excitingly, an unreleased sequel called Dracula and another game called Goblin Caves were on those cartridges, and fingers crossed at least one will be getting a similar polishing up for release!

FRANK N STEIN RE-BOOTED

COME UP TO THE LAB AND SEE WHAT'S ON THE SLAB



» [Spectrum] Slip slidin' away.







» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM
» **DEVELOPED BY:** COLIN STEWART
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/FRANK-REBOOTED
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2011
» **PRICE:** FREE

In a feat of bravery not too distant from those usually performed by game characters, former Spectrum developer Colin Stewart recently headed to the darkest corner of his loft in search of an ancient artefact. The treasures within included a couple of Microdrives and a wallet of cartridges that contained old work files for, among other things, his 1984 release *Frank N Stein*, along with a collection of levels and features that were left out of the final release. Armed with these antiquities, our hero vowed to produce a new version of his game for 2011.

Frank N Stein wants to make new friends, not by meeting for a drink but by assembling them from the bones up. And this is exactly what he does on the odd-numbered levels, the skeletal parts scattered around to be collected before life can be breathed into them. Of course, we all know the story of what happens after the monster is switched on, and the even-numbered levels see the creature turn on its creator, climbing to the highest part of the room and doing a Donkey Kong, releasing barrels and aiming to squash poor lonely Frank. Only the electrical switch will end this creature's reign of terror.

Each stage has a sprinkling of enemies to avoid, ranging from scorpions and bats to see-saws, coffins and cannons. Green slime, patches of ice and electrified blocks all serve to inconvenience Frank and, since he can't jump unaided during the odd-numbered levels, he'll need to rely on springboards to launch him upwards, teleporters to bridge gaps, and poles to slide down otherwise fatal distances.

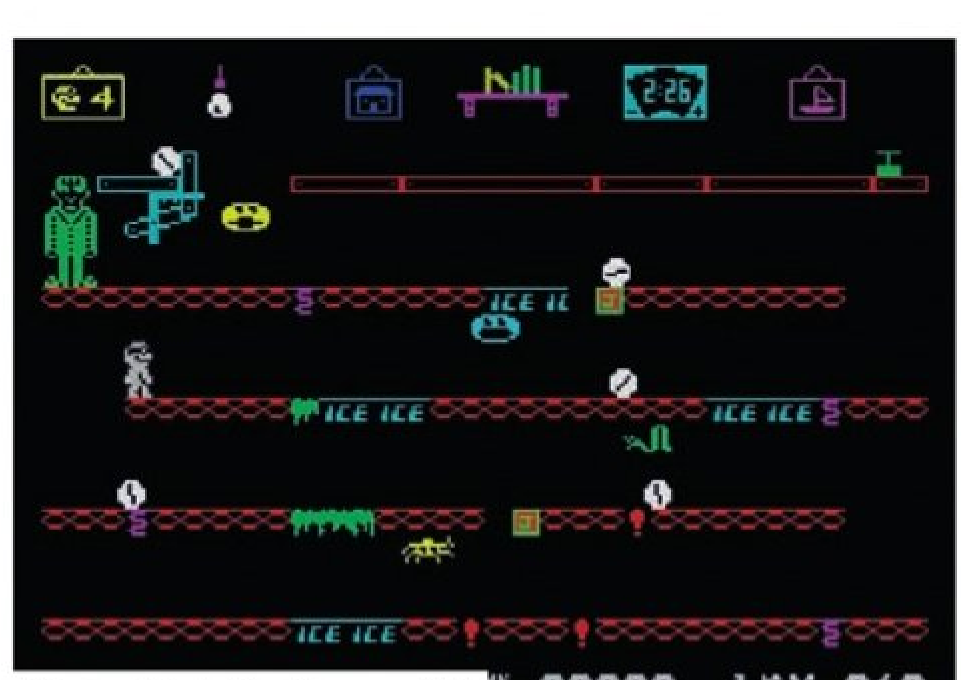
Frank N Stein was already tough, and *Re-Booted* isn't afraid to go further. Every stage is played against a strict time limit, with pixel-perfect jumps and split-second timing being the order of the day; a little planning is needed, because failing to work out a decent route in advance for even the first stage is almost certain to prove fatal.

Frank N Stein Re-Booted takes the skeleton of a tricky but enjoyable game and breathes new life into it. The graphics have remained faithful, with just a little tweaking to add new enemies or improve minor details, and the sound effects have been tuned up, so the most significant changes are to the game itself and, while the odd-numbered stages play the same as before, the even ones have been reprogrammed and expanded beyond the original.

90%



» [Spectrum] I ain't got no body.



» [Spectrum] Donkey Kong's lawyers called!

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

CHANG'S ADVENTURE

» **FORMAT:** C64 » **DEVELOPER:** JOONAS LINDBERG » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/CHANG-ENHANCED » **PRICE:** FREE



» [C64] Well, if nobody else wants it…

Chang and his lover, the princess Koong-Shee, have escaped from the evil warlord Li-Chi's island to what they believed would be the safety of Unknown Island, an uninhabited place well away from the beaten track. And for a few weeks they were indeed safe and living an idyllic life, until Li-Chi's spies found them.

Chang's quest is to reach the safety of his boat, but he'll have to face sword-wielding ninjas to collect two keys. Swords are scattered around or retrieved if a ninja's throw is dodged and, along with the keys to safety, there are treasures to collect as well.

Chang's Adventure is an unofficial sequel to Firebird's *Willow Pattern Adventure* and continues from where the original left off. The graphics aren't as good and the music can be repetitive, but the adventuring should keep anyone who was a fan of the original or enjoys making maps entertained.

83%

MANHOLE

» **FORMAT:** AMIGA » **DEVELOPER:** LEE HURLEY PRODUCTIONS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MANHOLE » **PRICE:** FREE

It would seem that somebody has stolen four manhole covers, leaving large holes in the ground that, if a hapless pedestrian should fall in, will no doubt result in calls to companies who try to pass the blame for people's accidents in their television commercials. You, as a sanitation worker armed with one spare cover and amazing athleticism, must bridge the gaps, risking life, limb and employment if too many people fall into the sewer.

Manhole is the latest example of a Nintendo Game & Watch title being converted to run on a classic computer, but what makes it a little unusual is that the target machine is the Commodore Amiga. A game as simple as *Manhole* should run on just about any machine with 512K of memory and isn't exactly going to tax the machine technically, but it manages to be both challenging and amusing in short bursts, and a reasonable test of reactions.

77%

» [Amiga] A pedestrian makes a big splash.




» [Atari 8-bit] I think my spaceship knows which way to go.





PATROL IN THE SPACE

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** M BRZEZICKI, T CIESLEWICZ AND R SZERNIEWICZ » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PATROL-SPACE » **PRICE:** FREE

Although it might look like a scrolling shoot-'em-up, there aren't any enemies to blast in *Patrol In The Space* so, as the title does hint, the player simply needs to travel through sectors of space in his rocket, avoiding the jagged edges of the scrolling landscapes. To make things trickier, the craft's fuel tank will need constant topping up from stations that appear regularly, some of which are easier to manoeuvre the ship into than others.

This is a simple 'dodge the scrolling landscape' type of game and the backgrounds are being generated randomly. The only challenge is steering the rocket away from everything that isn't an orange fuel dump and keeping the tank topped up. *Patrol In The Space* really could have done with a couple of extra elements being introduced as the levels progress, though, because, while it isn't actually a bad game as such, there isn't much meat there and it becomes repetitive very quickly.

52%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community


» [Amiga] Political dominance for beginners.

>> It began in Africa

Africa for the Amiga is based on the 1977 board game that allows up to five human players to take control of a major power each to battle for political supremacy in the southern half of the African continent. To achieve that goal, they'll need to interfere with alliances between nations, threaten economic stability and start wars between tribes. Warmongers need look no further than **kikstart.eu/amigan-releases**.



» [MSX] Not to be confused with *Crisis Core*.

>> Core designs

MSX fans have a spot of shooting action to look forward to in the form of *Core Crisis*, a vertical blaster hopefully being developed for release during this year's MSXdev game development competition. A lot of test data is apparently still in place for the work-in-progress video concealed behind **kikstart.eu/core-crisis**, and it should be less densely populated when released, but what they've got so far already looks solid.


» [CPC] Caravan shooting for the Amstrad!

>> Destroying strange new worlds

Format War's project *Edge Grinder* is now available to download and play on 128K Amstrad CPC hardware. Converted from the original by Paul Kooistra and boasting 25fps smooth scrolling, this is a caravan-style shoot-'em-up where the primary objectives are to rack up points and survive. **kikstart.eu/edge-grinder** has the CPC and C64 disk version to download right now.

THE RE-MAKING OF DINGO

In a brand new feature, we speak to the coders behind remakes of classic games, and find out what drives them to complete them. This month we're speaking to Søren Borgquist of Tardis Remakes and ex-Imagine and Ocean graphics artist Mark Jones about their impressive re-imagining of Dingo for the ZX Spectrum

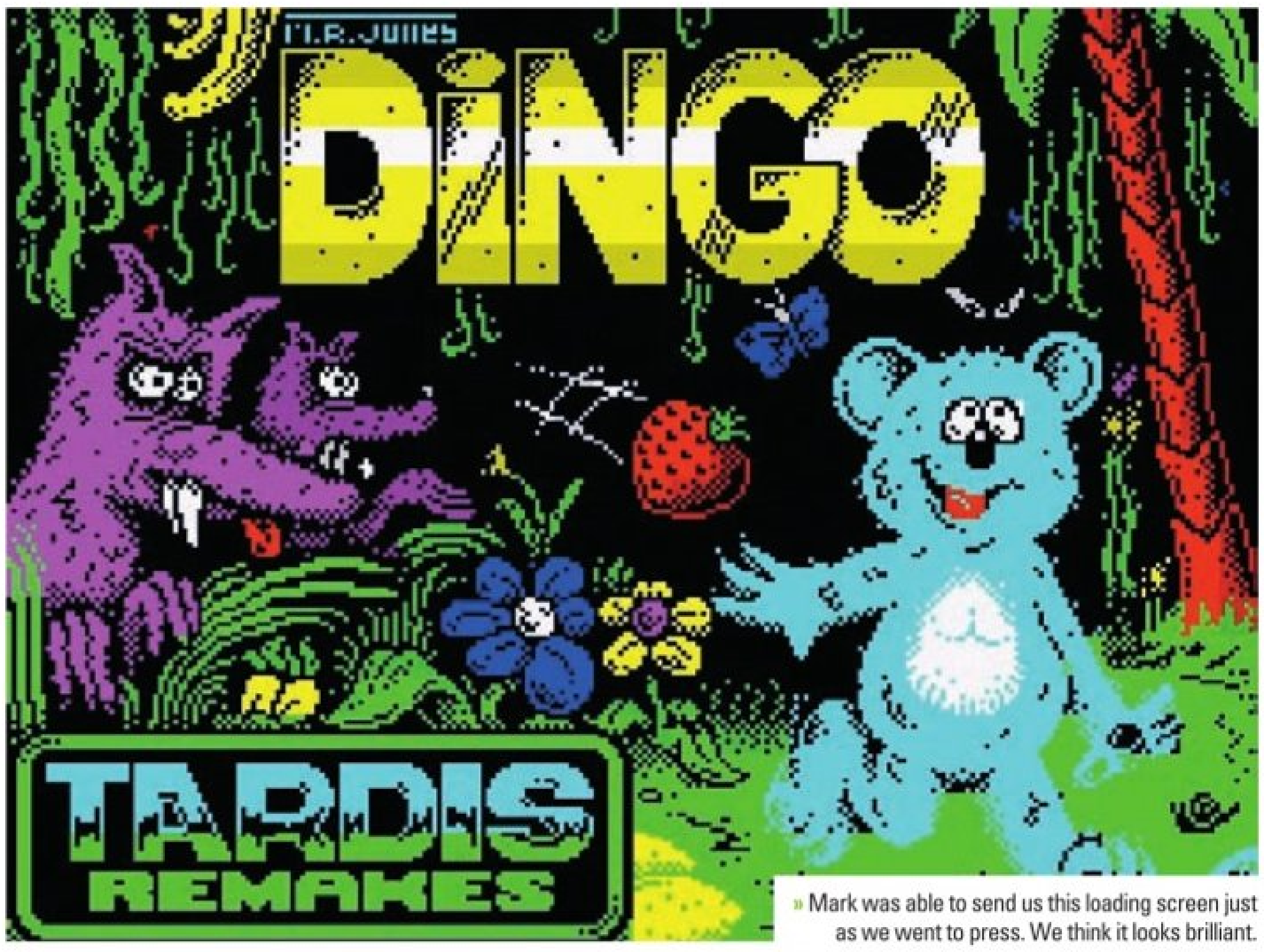


WHAT IS DINGO?

Dingo was an early release from the Stamper brothers and made its debut in 1983. It's a simple maze game that sees Dingo running around, collecting fruit, and avoiding his pink antagonists. While simple, it features the Stampers' typical slickness and is a lot of fun to play

Retro Gamer: So why choose *Dingo* as your first Spectrum game?
Søren Borgquist: Finding the right project was a bit of a problem – it couldn't be too big as this was my first try at a game in assembler language, so if I was too ambitious I may not have been able to finish it. I've seen many games being abandoned because of people trying to bite off more than they can chew, so it had to be a sensible choice that suited my abilities.

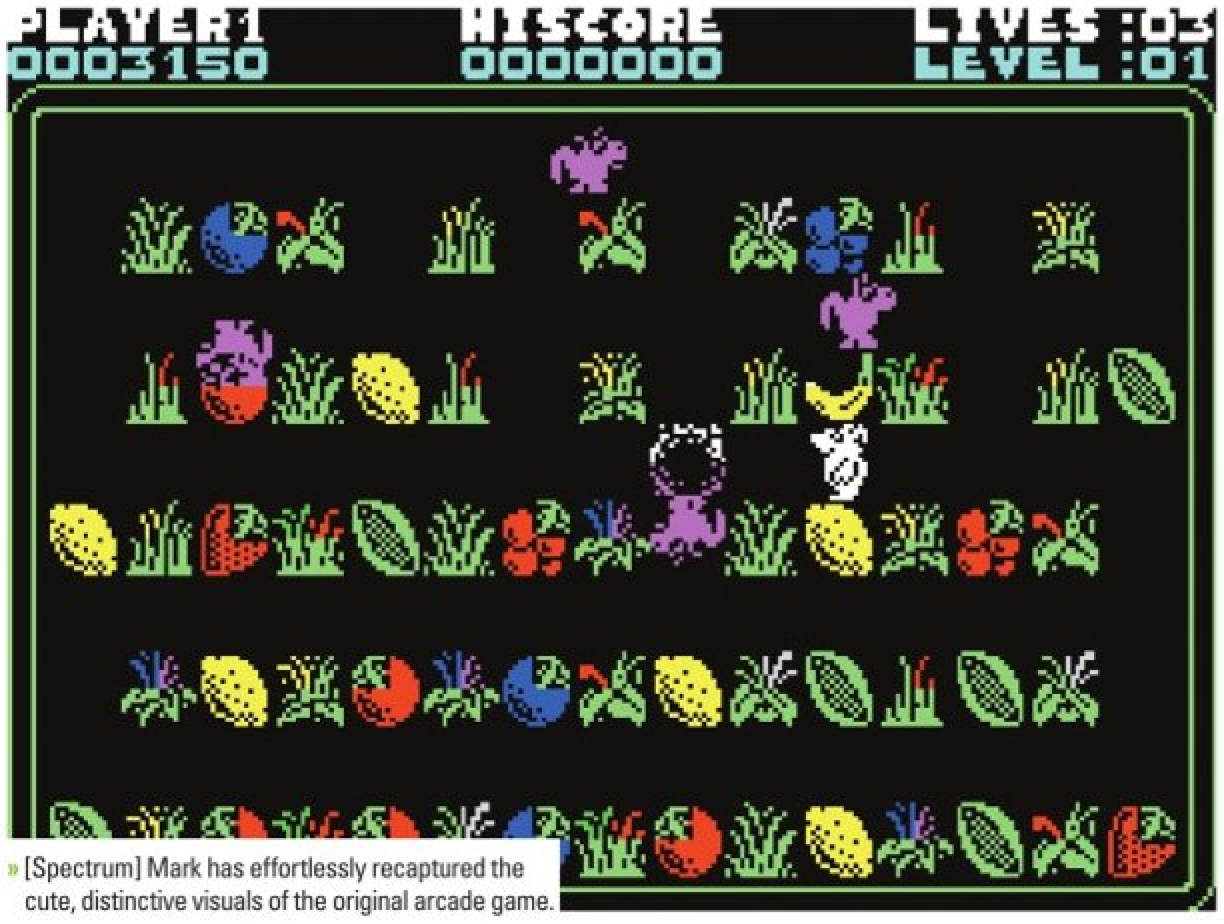
RG: How did you come to collaborate?
SB: I mentioned, in passing, on the World of Spectrum forums that I would need all-new graphics for the game. The project caught Mark's eye and he offered to help out, and I accepted. That was a very good decision, as I like his style and he's very fast and nice to work with. A couple of times I suggested we would need new graphics for something like the small portraits on the menu screen, and every time he said 'okay' and never dismissed it as a bad idea. We haven't agreed on absolutely everything, but I see this as a collaboration, and you have to be flexible so that everyone ends up happy.
Mark Jones: I'd been looking for some sort of games graphics work after getting back into retro games over the last 18 months or so, and I thought it would be fun. So I found myself a ROM of the game and fired up MAME and found it to be a cute, fun little game. I offered my assistance and it went from there. I hadn't got a clue if I could do it justice or not. I thought the only way to find out would be to try!



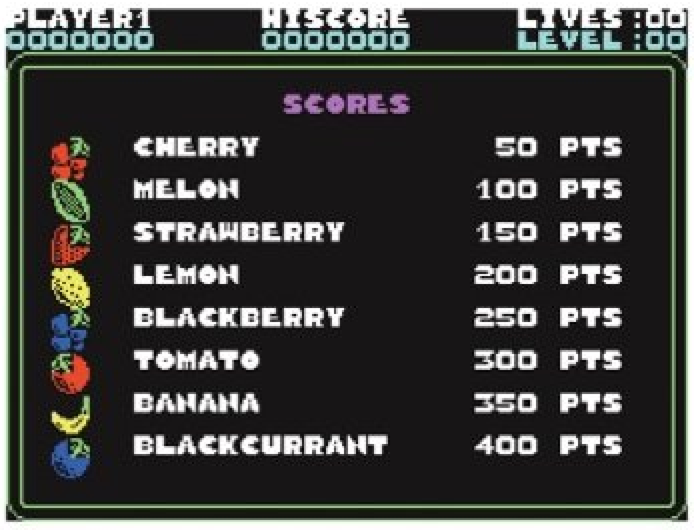
» Mark was able to send us this loading screen just as we went to press. We think it looks brilliant.

" I can't remember the last time I had so much fun doing anything graphics-wise "

RG: How long has the project taken, and what are the biggest obstacles you've encountered in developing it?
MJ: About two months so far, but this is all spare time work – an hour here or there. Some days can go past without me having done anything. I really had to clear the decks of all my extra other unpaid graphics work I do, as I really wanted to concentrate on this. It's going out there with my name on it, so I want everything to be perfect. The biggest obstacle has been just remembering how to do everything and learning a few new techniques and ways of going about things. I mean, I'm not making this on a ZX Spectrum and saving things to Microdrives any more. I've learnt a lot, re-oiled some cogs, so hopefully the next game I do I should be able to do it better and quicker.
SB: I dabbled a bit in Z80 back in the Eighties, but not by making games – just making small utilities and a demo that has somehow made it onto World of Spectrum. I expected having to spend a lot of time relearning the language, and it did take me a couple of days adjusting to the language and getting something on screen, but once I sat down and really started working on it, it just gelled. Towards the end of the project I also had to struggle to fit everything into the small amount of memory available, but all in all I'd say that the development of it has gone unexpectedly smoothly. Being able to ask questions and get help on the



» [Spectrum] Mark has effortlessly recaptured the cute, distinctive visuals of the original arcade game.





» Simple cut-scenes are used to explain *Dingo*'s cute story.



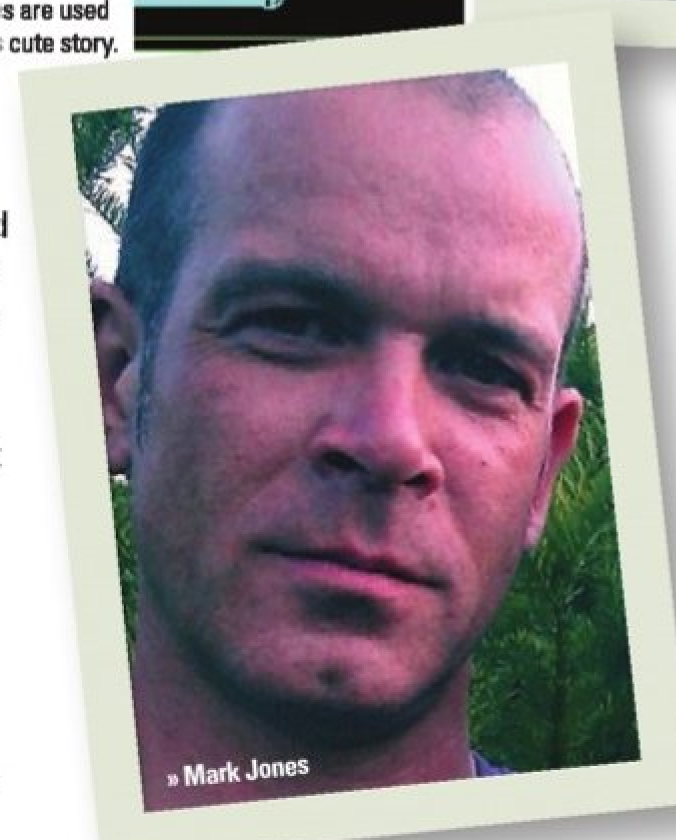
» Søren Borgquist

World of Spectrum forums definitely also helped.

RG: What has your involvement been?
MJ: I've done all the in-game graphics, which literally took me less than a working day! It's such a simple game that there wasn't that much work involved. Then, because I was itching to do more, I tried my hand at an illustration for the artwork, something I'd never done before. That took a good few days from start to finish. I'm no Bob Wakelin but, looking at it now it's all done, I think it's as good as some of the artwork that graced tape covers back in the Spectrum's heyday.

Sokurah then sent me a tune that someone had written for the game, and while it was great, we both felt it didn't suit the game. It sounded like the *Agent X* music. We wanted something a bit simpler. So, remembering that in 1987 I translated the arcade *Arkanoid* music to the Spectrum for the Imagine release, I fired up *Wham! The Music Box* on a Spectrum emulator and set about seeing if I could remember how to use it. Took a while, but it came back to me and I wrote a nice, original little title ditty and four shorter in-game tunes. So they've been put in too!
SB: I can usually put a game together pretty fast on PC because I've developed a small library of routines I can use again and again. But with this game I didn't have that and had to start from scratch. Design-wise, because the screen resolution on the Spectrum is smaller than on the original arcade game, I've had to change the orientation of the playfield from upright to horizontal, and shrink it a bit, but overall I don't think there's too big a difference – it's the same game, after all, and I feel I've done it justice. It has been a bit more difficult getting the gameplay difficulty right in this version, but I've definitely had more fun doing this version.

RG: What's it like working on the Spectrum after all this time?
MJ: It's been great! I can't remember the last time I had so much fun doing anything graphics-wise. And being able to email graphics off then see them in-game in literally a few hours has been fantastic. Working with Søren has been a real pleasure; he's listened to my feedback, and we've talked about stuff and agreed to disagree on a few things, and that's how it should be. And I'm so pleased that the game looks good and people seem really interested in it. So I'm chuffed to bits. I wasn't sure if producing graphics was like riding a bike, and I didn't know if maybe I'd forgotten how to do it. After all, it was 21 years ago I produced my last Spectrum graphics when I worked on *Total Recall* for Ocean. The general consensus so far is that it's looking good. Fingers crossed people like it. It's the loading screen I'm most worried about. It's the thing I'm remembered for; I did make quite a few back in the Eighties, so it would be horrendous if my first one after 21 years was rubbish! If it is then I'll scrap it and start again!

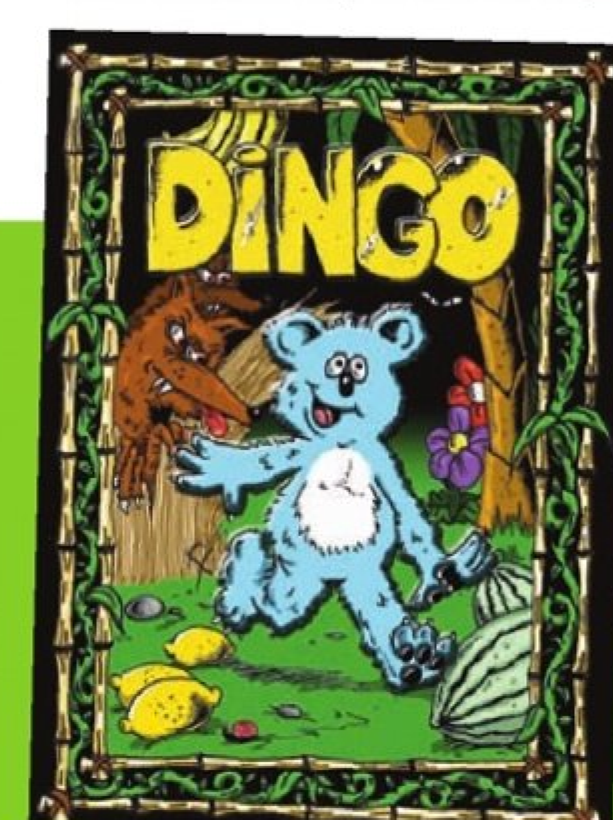


» Mark Jones

THE ULTIMATE HOMAGE

Mark Jones on Dingo's new box art

"I STARTED TO get carried away and, as an homage to Ultimate, I hunted down the type face they used on their inlays and I made two different *Dingo* inlays – one for a single tape box then another for the double tape boxes, both in the Ultimate style. The tape label was next. Then I produced a mocked-up advert, again in the style of the *Knight Lore* and *Underwurlde* adverts. I wanted people, should they feel the need, to be able to download these and make up a real cassette of this forgotten ACG title, and it could sit alongside the real Ultimate tapes without looking too out of place. Besides, I was having too much fun; I didn't want it to stop! We plan to make a very limited run of physical *Dingo* tapes to be available at this year's Replay event in Blackpool, but we won't be selling them as we don't own the copyright to the game. We're not sure how they are going to be given out – maybe as prizes. The last thing we want to do is annoy Rare, who still own the copyright. We want them to know we've done this as a bit of fun, and as an homage to the great Ultimate Play The Game label."

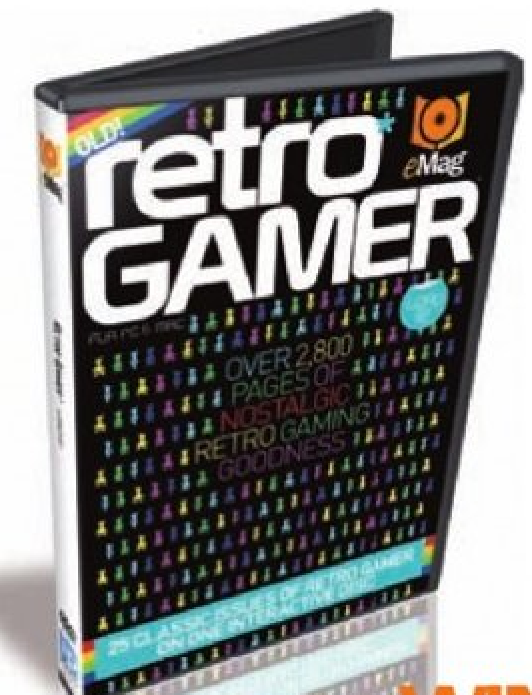


» Mark has done a fantastic job with *Dingo*'s art, easily re-creating the distinctive style of old Ultimate games.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

A PRINCE AMONG GAMES

Dear Retro Gamer,

I just wanted to let you know that someone has finally created a version of *Prince Of Persia* for the C64. It's a fantastic conversion and apparently uses most of the code from the original Apple II version. The project took the developer over two years to finish and even Jordan Mechner, the original's creator, has been on his forum to state how impressed he is. My only concern is that Ubisoft, the current owner of the license, don't try and pull the plug, because it's a truly staggering effort. Hopefully the fact that Jordan likes it so much means this doesn't happen. Be sure to visit: http://popc64.blogspot.com so you can see this fine effort for yourself.

Steven Smith



Thanks for bringing this to our attention Steven. Not being C64 owners back in the day, we didn't even realise it wasn't released on the platform. A quick play shows that it's still a fantastic game, and hopefully Ubisoft will leave this alone so C64 owners can enjoy this fantastic piece of work.

WHY NO INDIE?

Dear Retro Gamer,

I really enjoy reading the reviews and homebrew sections of the mag each month, but I wonder why you don't feature more games from Xbox Live Indie Games? Each week there are new games on this fantastic service and almost all of them owe a debt to a retro game or two. Unfortunately, the number of games released on it can be a curse as well, so it would be nice to read **Retro Gamer**'s recommendations and opinions on some of the Indie Games available. One I have picked up recently is called *Dead Pixels*, which is a sort of cross between *River City Ransom*, *Metal Slug* and *Resident Evil*, and every bit as fun as that sounds. A more dedicated section to XBLIG would be most welcome I'm sure.

Kind Regards,

Graeme Mason (jdanddiet)

You're right Graeme, there are some fantastic games on the service, particularly shooters. We've always been against putting them in the normal reviews sections, while the homebrew section always felt too small for them. The homebrew section is changing over the next few issues, though, so maybe we'll find some space for them there. They're probably overdue some sort of feature in the main magazine as well, as like iOS, it's a bastion for old-school gaming and shouldn't be ignored.





IN A SNIFF

Dear Retro Gamer,

I really like your magazine. Not only does it look the best on the stands, but it also smells the best by far, and believe me, I have smelled many in the past. There is just something about yours that drives the olfactory senses wild, and I often like to enjoy a red wine whilst sniffing the cover. This indulgence is actually preferred to some actual editions, especially those plagued with myriad errors like the last one. And in fact, if you don't pick up your game I might be forced to call the authorities. But that's okay, as long as you don't change your printing methods, I am pretty much pleased each month either way.

Yours sincerely,

Tony 'The Miracle' Dimov

It's great to hear that you love the smell of the magazine Tony. We're currently considering a 'scratch & sniff' effect on our next cover, so we'll be sure to send it on to you first to test it out. We're thinking maybe Donkey Kong's armpit, or Jetman's space boots.

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» YOUTUBE UPDATE



DARRAN HAS BEEN THINKING of a new direction to take the channel in, so that it more mimics the monthly contact of the magazine. If you're interested in this then be sure to contact him at the usual address **www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz**

ERROR CITY

Dear Retro Gamer,

What on earth was going on with the issue last month (95)? It was rife with errors, which isn't usually like your magazine at all. Stating *Bubble Bobble* was the first co-op game, mentioning that no Spectrum version had sound, the inclusion of *FIFA 2000* on the Mega Drive, the list goes on and on. I can appreciate that **Retro Gamer** is a big mag, but if you can't get simple facts straight (many of which could be checked with a little online research) it doesn't bode well for the rest of the mag. I mean, I know about these mistakes, but how many others that I don't know about are slipping through the net? I really love **Retro Gamer** and while the mistakes didn't stop my enjoyment of the articles in question, it was a shame to see so many of them.

David Turner, a concerned reader

You're not the only person to highlight these little hiccups David. Some of the mistakes were howlers on our part, which we'll put down to the usual holidays and deadlines. We'll be sure to keep on top of them for future issues, and may even bring back the Trainspotter Award if they start becoming too numerous. Glad to hear you still enjoyed the issue though.

HIGH SCORE HEROES

Dear Retro Gamer,

I'm writing on the eve of 'Mission Ispossible', a community event at retro shop, Game Link, where 20 plus gamers will attempt to break world records over the course of the weekend. The owner sent us the game itself as well as the score or time to beat by post, and we have all been practicing for the last few months.

Tired of the music from my particular assignment (Master System – My Hero), I was looking at the Twin Galaxies website and found that while Arcade games and the major console games are extremely competitive, there are many console or computer games (particularly PAL) that have either no high score or a fairly achievable one. So with the prevalence of camera phones, it's never been easier to record and submit your own score. So, if you fancy a stab at a world record, have a look at the Twin Galaxies site, read the rules and get submitting those scores. It would be great to see established records broken or new ones written!

RetroBob via email

This is a really interesting point RetroBob, and one that we've actually discussed in the office over teas. At one stage, Darran could actually constantly beat the surfing high score on *California Games* for the Atari Lynx, but at the time, never had a phone to record his achievement. We're guessing that the lack of PAL high scores comes from Twin Galaxies being a predominantly US site, but that doesn't mean we can't all join in. Maybe we'll change the current high score section and task readers with competing against each other for the best score.

ARCADE WOES

Dear Retro Gamer,

The other weekend I went to Weymouth, as it used to have some truly fantastic arcades on the seafront. When I got there, my precious »

> "There are many games that have a fairly achievable world record high scores"

RETRODATE PROFILE



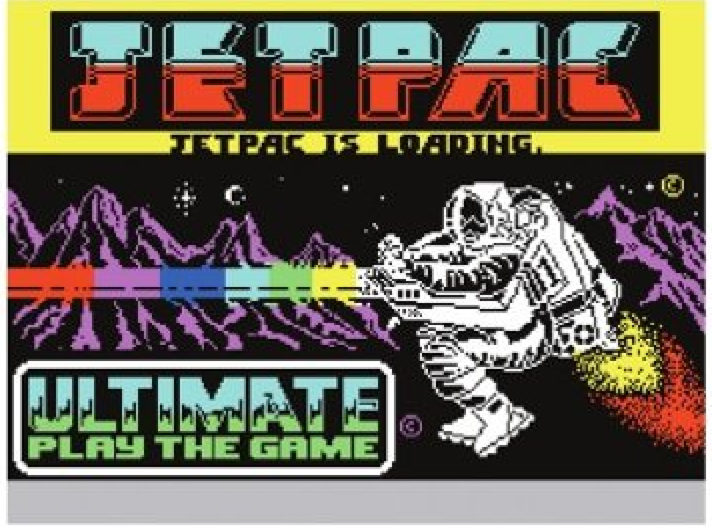
Name:	**Andrej Lazarević**
Joined:	**21 April 2010**
Location:	**Serbia**
Occupation:	**Student**
Website:	**Not given**
Fave Games System:	**SNES/Mega Drive**



» **[Master System] Thanks to RetroBob we've been playing, but not enjoying *My Hero*.**

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



JETPAC

This month we'd like all our readers to take part and play *Jetpac* on the ZX Spectrum. Email us your high score (with a photo or screenshot for proof) and the winner will be highlighted next issue.



High Score: 29,380



High Score: 11,940



DARRAN'S JETPAC TIPS

If you're not interested in progression then you can simply hang around a single screen and camp. It's a lot easier on the earlier stages due to the predictability of the sprites, but it's a slow and tedious way to amass some points.



STUART'S JETPAC TIPS

Learn to judge the attack waves of aliens. While their patterns initially look erratic, you'll soon learn how each type move. Another useful tip is to remember that your fire and movement wraps around the screen – handy for clearing an area you need to reach.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Domark game?

jdanddiet I always thought *License To Kill* on the Spectrum was one of the better Bond 8-bit videogame adaptations.

Bub&Bob Domark chucked out a fair amount of cack for the C64, but my fav was a really good conversion of *All Points Bulletin*.

rossi46 *F1* for the Mega Drive. At the time, it was amazing. My pal and I used to take turns to co-drive (rally style) and shout which left or right turn was coming next, just so the driver didn't have to take his eyes off the track. We got really good with this system, and won everything in the game. Happy days.

russty_russ I loved playing *Friday The 13th* on the Amstrad CPC 464. The variety of the soundtrack as you roamed around with an axe! Plus, at the end of the tape was a competition that you had to put it into a Hi-Fi, identify ten sound effects and if you sent the enclosed postcard back to Domark, you could potentially win a T-shirt. The joys of Eighties game competitions!

Hydrox The only Domark title I owned back then was *Super Space Invaders*, the PC version – so I'll go with that.

Morkin *Eureka!* as it's the only Domark game that I can remember ever playing.

bsg The A8/Beeb version of *Star Wars Arcade* – 'Nuff said.

thingonaspring Has to be *Championship Manager*(s) for me. Lost so many hours on the Amiga with the variations.

markopoloman Domark had very few decent games – loads of average ones, though. But top of the list for me would be *Split Personalities* (C64). Smashing game! Close runner-up to fave game by them would be the excellent *Rampart* – multiplayer heaven. *Castle Master* was pretty good, and would have been fantastic if the C64 could do faster 3D!

Havantgottaclue *Trivial Pursuit* – this was the only game which resulted in the C64 getting promoted to the big telly in the living room so that the whole family could play. Other than that, I spent some time on *Klax* and *Licence To Kill*, although I wouldn't call them firm favourites.

Mire Mare *Star Wars* has to be my first choice. The C64 conversion of the arcade game was superb – it ticked all the right boxes for fans of the film and original arcade game.

Whazeboo I have a soft spot for Domark's conversions of Tengen coin-ops. *Klax*, a casual puzzle game just as addictive as *Tetris*, is my favourite.

Mayhem Hmmm… the conversions of *Cyberball* and *All Points Bulletin* were good, and *License To Kill* is probably the best Bond game on an 8-bit. Gonna go with *Klax*, though. Another conversion, but also a quite accurate one, and retains all the playability.

HalcyonDaze00 *Championship Manager* – Amiga. The start of the best and most addictive management games ever!

ncf1 *RBI Baseball 2* – the best baseball game for years, until some better ones came along, at least.

deadpan666 Played *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters* loads, so I'll go with that! Never managed to rescue Professor Sarah Bellum, though. *Split Personalities* comes a very close second… I got it free with *CRASH* one Christmas, and so now it always reminds me of spending hours sliding blocks around on Christmas Day!

Sputryk Never played many, and I think none at all on my beloved Spectrum due in part to their poor quality, but *Shadowlands* on the Amiga was a real fine game. Came nowhere near completing it, mind.

Antiriad2097 *Star Wars* is perhaps the cliché, but *Shadowlands* and its sequel offer something new (ish) with significant depth to make them still worthy of a revisit.

Smurph I was a big fan of the *Desert Strike* conversion on the Master System, although I haven't played it recently to see if the years have been kind.

ipmarks Had a look on Wikipedia for a list of their releases and I'm afraid nothing really stands out.

Not a company I remember with a lot of fondness… lots of average review games, which I didn't personally buy.

fulgenzio *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters*: Good B-movie and Fifties comic atmosphere, nice animations and GREAT title.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

SOUL CALIBUR V

Megamixer Is anybody else interested in a new *Soul Calibur* game or have you all had enough now?

C=Style I'd prefer Namco to just remake the original Dreamcast game, fully intact with bonus content and super-lovely visuals. That would be more than enough for me. I'd actually be quite excited about that.

felgekarp Unless it features characters from outside the *Soul Calibur* universe, I won't be getting it.

ShadowNeku Personally, though, *SC1* and *2* were the best of the series. Didn't like the *Star Wars* additions for *4*, even though they were well implemented in the game. The challenge tower was, however, a great feature. Looking forward to this new one just to see what new characters they come out with.

SELLING SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

rapidly-greying I sold it after years of 'Will I? Wont I?' to finance collectors editions of *Batman*, *Uncharted 3* and *Skyward Sword*. The minute I walked out of the Post Office I knew I had made a big mistake. Does anybody else have any gaming-related regrets?

nakamura Gaming regrets? Selling my SNES in 2006-7 to put money into my car. I now have another, but half of the games are missing.

Ilj WHAT IS A MAN? A man is someone who holds onto his *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*!

highrise I wish I never sold *Keio Flying Squadron 2* on the Saturn. I bought it for £2 and sold it for £20, but it would cost me £40 to replace now. Some day I'll get it back.

8-BIT FOR THE FIRST TIME

ulala What is it like to go back to 8-bit when you have no rose-tinted spectacles or historical love for the games and the machines? Why do you play them?

Quantum Crayons I'm 18. I like the innovation, the concept of a bedroom coder. They were made by people just like me, who sat around making games in their spare time. That's what I'd like to be able to do, so I identify with the software houses on these machines.

Trixta When I explain to my son that games took ten plus mins to load and still wouldn't work, he just laughs.

paranoid marvin Is there anyone here who visited an arcade in the Eighties who wouldn't want to go back? What I wouldn't give for just one afternoon… or even a couple of hours.

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Alien* game is the best?

Aliens: Infestation



Alien 3



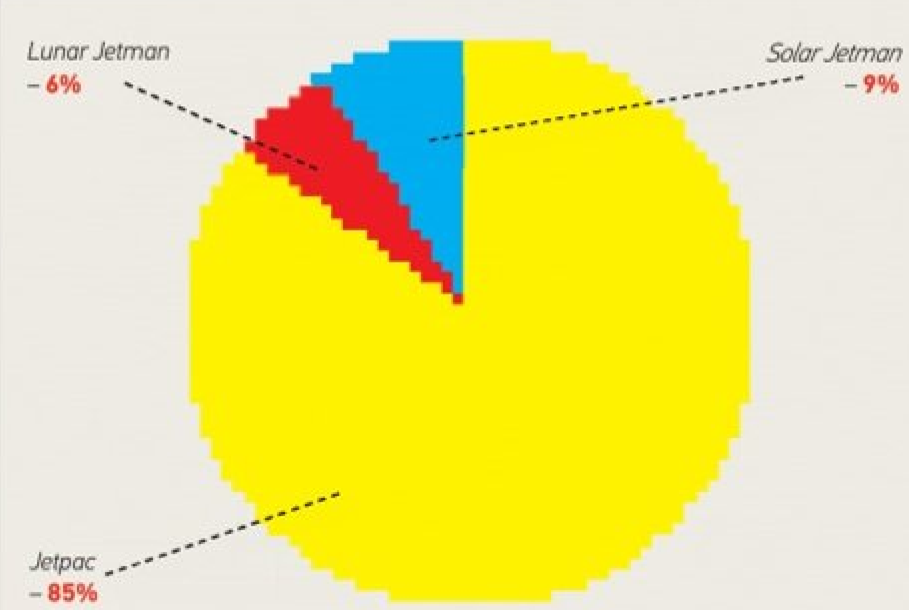
23% | 77%

Miketendo You can do Bishop's hand-knife trick with the stylus, which sold the game for me.

IronMaidenRule *Alien 3* was frustratingly difficult in places, but has great re-playability.

HOT TOPIC

Best Jetpac Game



"It's got to be the original *Jetpac* for me. It's one of the first games I ever played, so its quite special, along with *Manic Minor* and *Ant Attack*."
– Thompson9980

"*Jetpac*, no doubt about it. Superb game, and still incredibly playable to this day"
– richuk123

teen memories were quickly dashed, because the arcades are now in a very sorry state. Virtually every single arcade is now stuffed to the gills with fruit machines and penny grabbers. Yes, there are still games, but many of them are racing games, lightgun games or Guitar Hero games. I was able to find a smaller arcade with a few classics like *Rampage*, *Double Dragon* and *Shinobi* in, but most of these machines were either not working or charging a £1 a go!

Needless to say, no one was playing these games at such high prices, and they were simply sitting unloved at the back of one of the emporiums that I visited. I'm sure that if the prices were dropped more people would play them, but the owner just didn't seem interested.

I used to love playing arcade games back in the day. Hell, I'd spend all my spare time in arcades, so it's heartbreaking to see them all in such a sorry state now.

Paul Staddon

You're right Paul, arcades are in a real poor state at the moment and it's unlikely to get any better. Darran used to spend every year in Porthcawl in South Wales, which was crawling with great arcades when he was a nipper. A recent return a few years back was a truly sobering experience, with many of the classic games replaced with fruit machines and the penny grabbers that you mentioned. He found a *Star Wars* machine (a sit down one, no less) but it was a far cry from the late Eighties, when said game could be found in every arcade there. Maybe one day a serious collector will open his own personal arcade up to the masses (surely there's some money in this?) but until then we're just going to have to keep wandering the windy seafront and see if we can stumble on some hidden treasures.

> "I used to love arcades. It's heartbreaking to see them in such a sorry state now"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The GMAs

This month we've been discussing the odds of winning the Games Media Awards for the second year in a row. Stuart is optimistic about it, as he feels that there's been a great amount of wonderful content in the mag. Darran, on the other hand, isn't too sure, and thinks that winning last year excludes the magazine from having a fighting chance this year. Still, it should be fun not regardless of who wins, and the night is always a good laugh. Kate, on the other hand, isn't fussed, as she can't go anyway.



» [Arcade] Where you once would have found tonnes of great games in arcades, you'd be hard-pressed to find a classic like *Rampage* today.

AMSTRAD LOVE

Dear Darran,

What's with all the Amstrad love that continually creeps into the magazine? I know that you and Stuart both owned one back in the day, but surely that's no excuse for all the bias that appears. You'll constantly rate the Amstrad higher than both the Spectrum and C64, even though in many cases the ports in question are utter pish. The Amstrad was a truly terrible machine, with no redeeming features, and you guys should be ashamed for trying to twist history and make it out to be better than it actually was.

A C64 fan who loved *Rastan*

Yes, both Stuart and Darran grew up with Amstrads, and yes, they love them to death. But let's face it, we all love our first computer; it's like your first girlfriend – impossible to forget. We actually feel that we've toned the Amstrad love down quite a lot recently, so we're somewhat surprised by your letter. This issue's Top 25 C64 Games feature should make you feel a bit better, and clear the air that Retro Gamer isn't biased. *Rastan* really was rubbish on the C64, though. Even the developer admitted it.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Magic: The Gathering Online

Innistrad has just been released for *Magic: The Gathering Online*, and I can't get enough. It's truly gothic, with vampires, zombies, and humans that can turn into werewolves. Wizards is still keeping it fresh.





STUART

Resident Evil 4 HD

Despite always hearing about how good it was, I missed *Resi 4* first time round. I got my act together and bought the HD re-release, and I have to admit – it's bloody good. The scariest thing so far, though, has been the price.





DAVID

Chase HQ

I've been replaying Taito's classic cops-and-robbers game, both on arcade and my trusty CPC. I was always amazed by *Chase HQ*'s digital speech on the CPC 6128, and it still brings a nostalgic tear to my eye today.

retro GAMER

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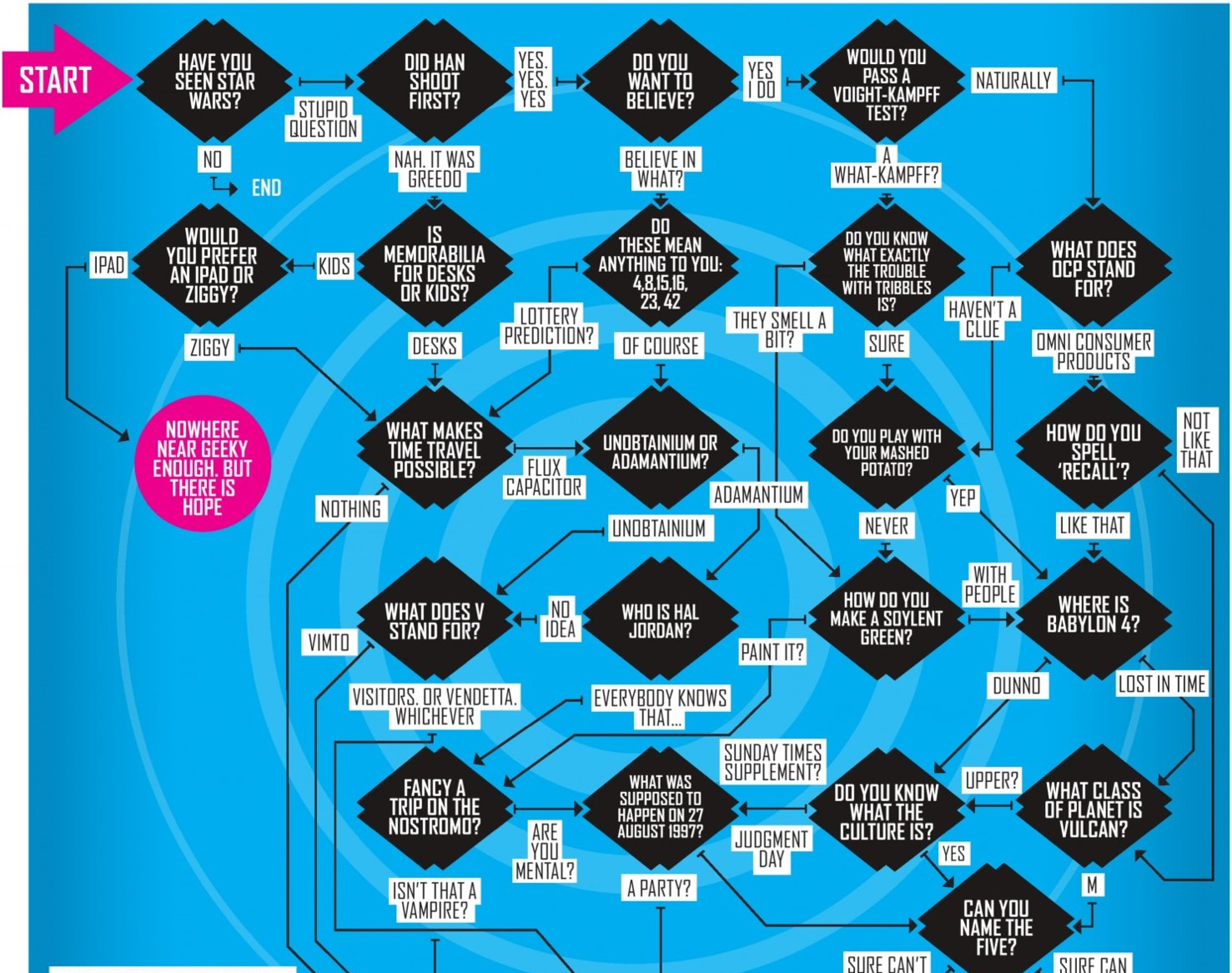
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Super STAR WARS

One of the biggest movie trilogies of all time received a super set of adaptations for Nintendo's SNES. Discover how Sculptured Software and LucasArts made gamers feel the Force

ALSO IN THE NEXT ISSUE



Tape Wars
■ Martyn Carroll recounts the mounting wars between magazine publishers as they fought for the best cover tapes.



Dragon Quest
■ Creator Yuji Horii exclusively reveals why one of the most popular JRPG franchises of all time remains so popular.



Atari Lynx
■ Atari's handheld boasted some of the best arcade conversions around. Lynx programmers explain why.



CRL Group
■ From text adventures to ninja hamsters, find out the story behind the creation and struggles of the CRL Group.


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ENDGAME



PRINCE OF PERSIA (MEGA CD)

» The Mega CD and TurboGrafx-CD versions of Prince Of Persia are unique over all others for their introduction of anime-style cut-scenes and enhanced audio. Therefore, unless you've played and finished either of these versions you won't have seen, or heard, the action-packed bloody finales that were retrofitted to their end bits. No need to worry, though, because we have the visual part for you right here…



01

» After an epic balcony battle, the brave Prince walks away victorious after kicking the evil Jafar square in the spine and causing him to fall onto a bottle of ketchup. Making a terrible mess, the Jafar concedes the fight.



02

» Splattered with sauce as a result of the impact, the Prince stands over his fallen adversary with an expression of pure anger. It's perfectly reasonable: Ketchup is an incredibly stubborn stain to remove, particular in Ancient Persia.



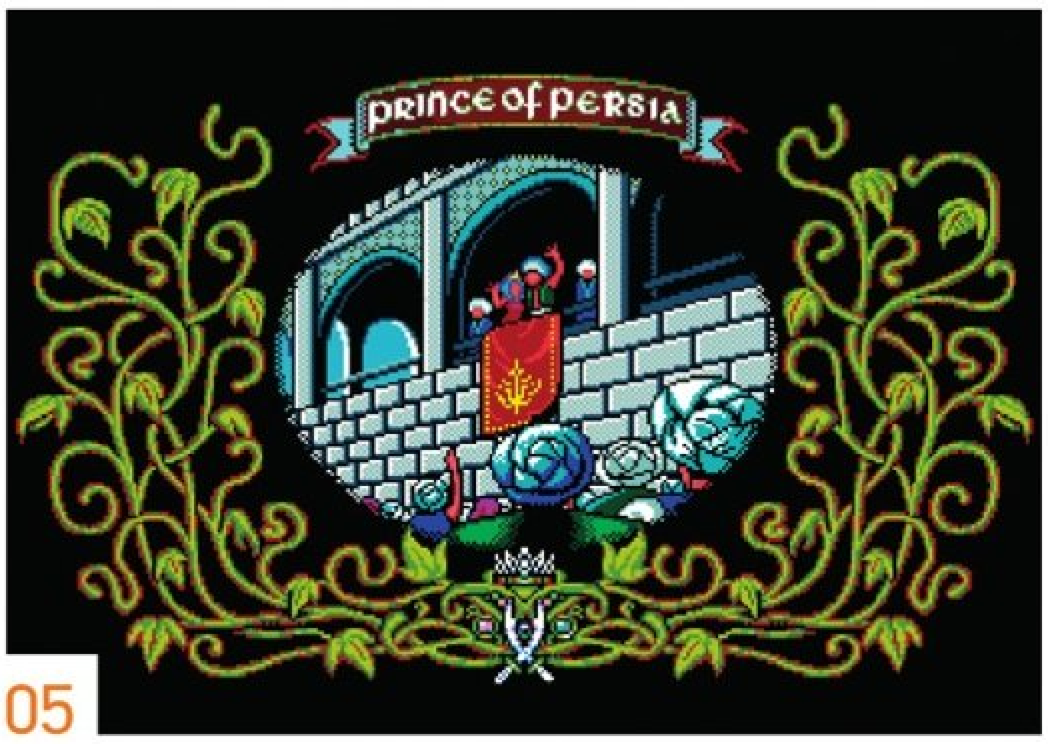
03

» Thankfully his mood is lightened by the arrival of the Princess, who has been stood by a doorway watching the entire event unfold. She assures the Prince that she'll be able to remove the stains by setting him alight.



04

» Delighted by this, he dashes towards the Princess and scoops her up into his ketchup-smothered arms. Now both covered in the red condiment, the pair take their messy predicament as a sign from the love god Heinz to wed at sunrise.



05

» The next morning the two exchange their vows and celebrate their union in front of the people of Persia. Sadly, during the commotion, nobody spots the two sneaky umpa lumpas staging a revenge attack on behalf of the Jafar using a bottle of Marmite.


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